

# **THE MASTER AND MARMELADOV**

A Gothic Tale About Political Correctness  
and Other Virtues

Gabriel Choreb

The Birchbark Press of Karacharovo

Gabriel Choreb: *The Master and Marmeladov: A Gothic Tale*  
*About Political Correctness and Other Virtues*  
The Birchbark Press of Karacharovo  
wolandusa@yahoo.com  
ISBN 0-938618-11-3  
© 2010 by Anna Dranova





## The Master and Marmeladov

The events portrayed in this book really happened. The colleagues and associates of Professor Marmeladov are portrayed precisely as I remember them. No names have been altered. O brave new world, that has such scholars in it!

-- *Gabriel Choreb*



## CHAPTER ONE: NEVER TALK TO STRANGERS

All the citizens of Hogtown have the greatest respect for our college. After all, it isn't easy to build a bastion of enlightenment in these torrid swamplands. You build a tower -- and before you can say "Jack and the Beanstalk" your tower has sunk back into the swamp. You build a second time -- and the swamp swallows it again. You build a third time and think you've conquered the powers of darkness, but before you know it the rainforest has closed in around your tower and it's lost to oblivion.

The highway to the Magic Kingdom runs straight through Hogtown, but few stop or slow down so near to the fantasyland which is their final destination. Few outsiders have heard of Professor Marmeladov or the drama which so recently unfolded around him. Even most Hogtowners have heard only bits and pieces of the story. We mostly bask in the shade of the Tower and rarely venture inside its thick, stone walls. I learned much of the tale from E.T. Poogh, Professor of Russian, whose papers I have often typed. E.T. still lectures at the college and made me swear to never reveal the name of the institution, which recently gave him a handsome raise. He is of a timid nature and even in our private conversations he speaks of the college cryptically as the Magic Kingdom. Out of habit -- and out of respect to E.T. and the Hogtowners who still hold the college in high esteem -- I will also use this term, although the Magic Kingdom is actually a good distance further down the highway.

Our story begins on an unusually hot day in the early fall, as the Modern Languages Department was about to decide the fate of Professor Marmeladov. Three years had passed since Yuri Ilyich's old Mercury was towed into Hogtown after breaking down on North Marsh Road. It was the beginning of August. By a freak turn of fortune, his arrival came just as the college was beginning to search for a new Russian instructor to replace the one who had left so suddenly, only two weeks before the opening day of classes. As usual in such urgent sit-

uations, the burden of the emergency was borne by the department secretary, Zoya Shortcut, whose lot it was to type, lick and seal all necessary letters and announcements as well as to contact by phone all of the friends and colleagues of the chairman and his wife in search of a Ph.D. in Russian willing to work in the Magic Kingdom for \$18,000 a year. Zoya no doubt saw the hand of Providence at work when the old émigré from Leningrad first introduced himself in the Modern Languages office, hoping to find some Russian newspapers to read while the sly mechanic pretended to replace his healthy old alternator.

The inquisitive reader might wonder why so modest a salary was being offered to a scholar with an advanced degree. The answer lies in the time-honored traditions of the Tower, where a modest, inconspicuous salary is offered when the new faculty member is expected to comport himself in corresponding fashion; that is to say, modestly and inconspicuously. As many people know, there is a world of difference between the explicit rules of the Faculty Handbook and the time-honored traditions of the Tower, which cannot be encoded in writing without striking at the very foundation of the institution. If tradition had been carved in stone at the gateway to the Tower, or if someone had simply whispered the situation into Marmeladov's ear, then the story which you are about to read would have never taken place and, if someone were to write it, the story would be mere fiction.

Unfortunately for Professor Marmeladov, nobody warned him of the danger – and even if anyone had warned him, it is questionable how modest and inconspicuous Yuri Ilyich might have forced himself to be. Modesty and mouse-like meekness were not in his nature, especially after a few drinks. If he had been warned, perhaps he would have loaded his old Mercury once again and headed out of town. Who knows?...

But our story begins on that hot afternoon three years later on the sandy bank of Hog Creek, where the willow bends low over the water and the Tower looms tall in the distance. All Hogtowners know the spot, which is blessed with a wrought-iron bench donated by Greta Faust, the wealthy

spinstress who sought immortality through engraved gifts of stone and steel but came closer to her goal when she was decapitated by a stray bull gator during a midnight stroll not far from that very spot where the willow bends low over Hog Creek. And it was beside the willow on Greta's bench that E.T. Pough met with Wilbur Coldburn, Dean of Humanities, barely an hour before the Modern Languages Department was to embark upon deliberations that would decide Marmeladov's fate.

Only an emergency could induce E.T. to speak with Dean Coldburn. E.T. prizes his peace and solitude above anything else and systematically avoids his colleagues and college administrators as a potential threat to the delicate balance of his rocking chair. It was with great reluctance and trepidation that he sought out Dean Coldburn, stalking him as he walked down the winding trail to Hog Creek, where the dean was fond of spending his lunchtime.

As always, E.T. was dressed in his crumpled blue sport coat and slightly soiled black pants, which he hitches high, revealing his immaculately ironed white socks. As Coldburn sat on Greta's bench and ate his ham sandwich, E.T. lurked in the shadows, hesitating, wringing his sweaty hands and changing his mind seven times before finally mustering the resolve to approach the dean. There were many reasons for hesitation. First, it was quite pleasant to stand in the cool shade of the old oaks draped with Spanish moss. The heat and humidity were most uncomfortable and only a few clouds cantered across the sky as forerunners of the usual late afternoon storm. And why should he stick his neck out for Marmeladov, anyway? What did he owe Marmeladov? Why shouldn't he let nature take its course and assent to the chairman's efforts to terminate Yuri Ilyich? And was there really any chance of success? Hardly! Helmut Hörnerträger, the chairman, was quick to see in Marmeladov a personality that was out of control. The stubborn old émigré could not be relied upon to support the chairman's plans and – who knows? – he might even cast a lone ballot against Hörnerträger's continued tenure as chairman. Marmeladov was forever bemoaning American students' laziness and lack of dedication. His courses made

demands on the students that were hardly conducive to popularity and impressive enrollment figures, which the chairman valued so highly.

For over two years, Hörnerträger had meticulously developed a case against Marmeladov, attacking him on three fronts in his annual reports and shaping his colleagues' perceptions of Yuri Ilyich in their private conversations. The odds seemed insurmountable, especially in view of the fact that Marmeladov had struck up no special friendships among his colleagues, who regarded him as a relic from an ethnographic museum. But E.T. finally emerged from the shadows nonetheless and, nervously kneading the brim of his panama hat, approached Greta's bench, where Coldburn was unwrapping his second ham sandwich.

"Sir, may I speak with you for a moment?" E.T. began sheepishly.

Coldburn glanced at his watch. "Sure, E.T. I have to get back to the office, but I have a few minutes. Sit down."

E.T. lowered his rotund figure onto the bench beside the trim dean, whose three-piece pinstripe suit gave him the air of a Wall Street executive or traveling salesman. Biting into his sandwich, he continued: "I saw you over there behind that tree. I wondered how long you were going to stand there."

"I... didn't want to disturb your lunch."

"Care for some apricot juice?"

"No, thanks. I just had breakfast... Dr. Coldburn, I felt I should speak with you about Yuri Marmeladov."

"Marmeladov?... Ah, yes, the one who's made the outrageous claims."

"We're voting on his tenure this week."

"Democracy at work. The democratic process. I believe in the process. Don't you, E.T.?"

"Well, sir, I'd just like to ask you to keep a close eye on his case. I'm worried that Marmeladov won't get a fair shake."

Coldburn choked slightly on his apricot juice, but then replied: "I'm a sociologist, not a literature specialist, of course, but – between you and me – is he in his right mind? As I understand it, he claims to have made the biggest discovery in the history of the world or something..."

“In the history of Dostoevsky scholarship.”

“Ah, Dostoevsky scholarship! How long has Dostoevsky scholarship been going on? Ten years?”

Suddenly a voice from Hog Creek interrupted their conversation: “Actually, about a hundred, my friend.”

Startled, both E.T. and Coldburn looked upstream, where the willow bends low over the water. They saw a man in a gray suit coat and waist-high waders emerging from beneath the dreamy boughs of the willow. His gray beret with unnaturally large fishing lures was turned down dashingly over one ear, and he carried an enormous, finely woven net. He continued as he waded closer: “Sorry to intrude, gentlemen, but when the topic is a great Russian classic, I can’t help but join in.”

“Obviously an out-of-stater,” thought E.T.

The stranger stepped up onto the sandy shore. He appeared to be a little over forty. His mouth was rather crooked. He was smoothly shaven, with dark hair. His right eye was black, the left was green for some reason. His eyebrows were black, but one was higher than the other.

“A new discovery?” the stranger continued. “It’s good to hear that science is moving forward – not just churning the same old water. What have they discovered now?”

“Yes, E.T.” Coldburn chimed in skeptically. “What is it he’s discovered? Gunpowder? The lightning rod?”

“Well, in a manner of speaking...” E.T. replied, still kneading the brim of his panama hat. “He’s uncovered a major leitmotif that runs through at least a dozen of Dostoevsky’s works. Totally unnoticed before. It has to do with Elijah the Prophet...”

“You don’t say?” the odd stranger inquired, stepping closer and thrusting the long pole of his fine-meshed net into the soft sand on the pathway. “Well, well... This is interesting. In old Russia, Elijah was venerated as the giver of rain.”

“That’s right,” agreed E.T. “They believed the sound of thunder is made by Elijah as he rumbles across the clouds in his chariot and flings down lightning bolts to remind us of our sins and the Last Judgment.”

“You don’t believe in this Elijah business?” the stranger asked, turning to Coldburn.

Coldburn smirked. “Well, the whole thing sounds half-baked,” Coldburn objected as he folded his lunch bag, preparing to leave. “What’s your field?” he asked.

“Fireflies,” the stranger replied.

“Ah, you’re a zoologist. Then you know something about scientific method. The wheels of an overactive imagination turn much faster than the slow wheels of science. Has the academic community recognized Marmeladov’s ‘discovery’? Has he been published by any major presses?” he asked, turning to E.T.

E.T. only spread his plump little fingers in reply. After a momentary silence, he mustered a shaky defence: “All of us are carried away by our imaginations from time to time. Yuri Ilyich is a hard worker and dedicated scholar...”

“With an overactive imagination and a Napoleon complex. His claims are a bit risky -- for the institution, at least,” Coldburn retorted.

The stranger squinted as he eyed the dean inquisitively. “Sir,” he urged, “if I were in your position, I’d be more careful in passing judgment on my colleagues’ work. There might be more to this Elijah than you might think...”

“But you’re *not* in my position, are you?” Coldburn calmly replied.

E.T.’s suspicions were more or less confirmed. He thought: “Hörnerträger and the dean have already decided Marmeladov’s case behind the scenes. The departmental vote is only a formality...”

The stranger argued: “Positions, Dr. Coldburn, are delegated by men, but a higher power can always cut the thread. Who’s to say that I won’t be in *your* position by... by next year or... or even tomorrow afternoon?”

Struck by the fact that the stranger knew his name, the dean turned to E.T.: “Is this some sort of setup? What the hell is going on here?”

E.T. only managed to stammer “I-uh...” when his dentures fell.

“Are you on our staff?” Coldburn inquired.

“I’m just doing some research here. I’m from out of state. My name’s Woland,” the stranger said, extending a hand.

At these words E.T.’s jaw fell open again. He tried to speak, but because he was still wrestling with his dentures the only sounds that came out were: “Or-e-oh-uh?!”

The stranger continued to reason with the dean as he shook his hand: “Dr. Coldburn, you really should reconsider. There could be dire consequences...”

“Lightning’s going to strike me, I suppose?”

“Possibly worse,” the stranger replied, still clutching Coldburn’s hand firmly.

“Well, that’s a chance I’ll just have to take. ...What’s going on here?” the dean protested, grimacing as he wrested his hand free from Woland’s grasp. The dean glanced at his watch and rose to leave. “E.T., your fly’s open.” Those were his last words before turning brusquely to march back to his office in the Tower. But as his shoulder drew even with the stranger’s firefly net, something snapped overhead, followed by a deafening crash. E.T., who had now stood up and was groping for his fly, which he could not see over his protruding paunch, felt the hair on the sides of his head stand on end. On the bald spot in the middle, he felt intense heat and a tingling that passed down to his fingers and toes. His knees buckled and he covered his head with his hands as he tumbled to the ground, but as he fell he caught a glimpse of Coldburn’s shadow on the sand. He distinctly noted how, superimposed on the shadow of the enormous firefly net, all the dean’s fingers were clenched as though he were clinging to a cliff over a dark abyss.

E.T. did not see the firefly net light up like a lamp filament as 700,000 volts passed through to the ground. Nor did he see the sheaves of blue sparks and flame that showered down upon the dean as he fell, stiff and writhing, to the sand. But he heard a second loud crackling as another lightning bolt hit the net pole in immediate succession, followed by a deafening double crash of thunder overhead. E.T. hid his face in the sand. A few meager raindrops sprinkled down, and all grew quiet except for the animated chatter of startled birds in the oaks.

When E.T. raised his head, the stranger who called himself Woland had disappeared. The air now had a metallic quality. Coldburn lay motionless in the sand, his gray suit torn and charred, especially on the shoulder, where smoke still rose from the torn, bleeding flesh. Smoke slowly streamed from between the dean's swollen, bluish lips, which now seemed to close slowly in the fine filigree shadow of the firefly net which crisscrossed the victim's tortured face. Beside him lay the half-eaten ham sandwich.

E.T. wanted only to run from this evil spot as fast as his legs would carry him. Even in the best of circumstances that wasn't very fast, and now his legs were shaking so badly that he could hardly stand up. He set off down the pathway as fast as he could, stopping frequently to catch his breath and wipe away the streaming sweat.

Finally he emerged from the trees into the broad expanse of College Boulevard, which the city council had recently voted to pave just as soon as enough bricks could be salvaged from the walls of the old brick factory that was scheduled for demolition. Here E.T. redoubled his exertions, but soon ran out of breath altogether and stopped to wipe his streaming forehead.

At this point he caught sight of Kitty Kelly, who was gliding to class on her new pink Schwinn. E.T. waved his crumpled handkerchief, but young Kitty didn't seem to notice, so he stepped out into her path and called out: "Miss!" All alone on the boulevard, she gave a scream and swerved to the left, nearly falling from the bicycle, but then she regained her balance and pedalled onward, looking back over her shoulder at her pursuer and screaming hysterically. E.T. quickened his pace, waving his arms and pleading with Kitty, but the race was more than his lungs could bear. He slowed to a walk and wiped the streaming sweat as the despairing screams faded into the distance. By the time he came within sight of the Tower, two squad cars were waiting with lights flashing. In the distance, two policemen peered in his direction through black sunglasses as young Kitty stood by her bicycle and pointed a finger of outrage in the direction of her attacker. Beside her stood Mercy Lewis and little Annie Putnam with their bicycles.

“The bastards could at least give me a lift,” thought E.T.

Finally, out of breath and drenched in sweat, the attacker reached the squad cars and lowered his behind onto the rear bumper of one of the cars. He sat there panting as his recent quarry gave positive identification: “Yeah, that’s the guy! That’s the guy who tried to attack me!”

“Did you accost this young lady?” asked one of the officers, stepping toward E.T.

“Call 911,” E.T. gasped in reply. Just then the bell rang and students began to file from the Tower.

“Cut the wisecracks!” the officer snapped back. “Were you stalking this girl?”

“I’m lucky... to be alive,” E.T. panted. “I was nearly killed...”

“Cut the crap! None of that ‘tough childhood’ bullshit! We’ve heard it a million times.”

“No, listen. It was Woland... believe it or not... He got Coldburn... My fly was open... his last words... It was a trap...”

“An ambush, huh? Your fly’s still open. Okay, we’re taking you in. Do you understand that anything you say may be used against you in a court of law? You have the right to remain silent...”

“But I don’t want... to remain silent... Coldburn’s been hit by lightning... two times... We’ve got to get help!”

E.T. was frisked, handcuffed and seated in the squad car as curious students crowded around to watch. E.T. covered his face with his hands but, peering between his fingers, he could see that it was already too late -- many students had seen him. While the officers radioed in to headquarters, one student took the opportunity to slip a hastily scribbled composition through the window of the patrol car to E.T., apologizing that it had not been ready on time. The paper complicated matters at the police station because it began as follows:

*“Gentlemen, we’re all cruel, we’re all monsters, we all make men, and mothers, and babes cry, but let us agree right here and now that of all men I am the lowest reptile! I’ve sworn to change, but I continue doing the same*

*despicable things. It's clear to me now that men like me need a blow, a blow of destiny to catch them in a noose and bind them by an external force. Never, never would I have risen by myself. But the thunderbolt has struck. I accept the torture of accusation and my public shame. I want to suffer, and by suffering I shall be cleansed. Perhaps I will be cleansed, gentlemen? I accept my punishment, not because I killed, but because I intended to kill, and perhaps I might have actually killed. But I intend to fight this out with you, I warn you! I'll fight it out with you to the very end, and then God will decide..."*

Naturally enough, the police were reluctant to believe E.T.'s claim that one of the slaggards in his Russian literature class had simply tried to foist upon him plagiarized excerpts from *The Brothers Karamazov*. Two detectives were dispatched to the public library on a fact-finding mission. Confusion ensued when the detectives reported by walkie-talkie that no such title was found in the library. They asked for possible subject headings in the card catalog (circus acts? secret societies?) and inquired whether the Karamazovs were co-authors of the book. Calls were made to the Library of Congress and to the State Library, after which E.T.'s "confession" was put aside. A copy was kept on file just in case, and somehow the rumor got around that a certain Dmitry Karamazov had tried to kill Coldburn with a brass pestle.

By evening our police sorted out most of the major facts of the case. A patrol car was dispatched to the scene of the accident. Much to E.T.'s astonishment, Coldburn was still clinging to life. He was rushed to Hogtown Memorial Hospital, where he remained in a comatose state and was not expected to live. His wife was summoned to the intensive care ward from the local health spa, and the college president's office immediately arranged for a special service to be held at noon the next day in the college chapel.

After the detectives completed their questioning, E.T. asked for a word in private with the chief, Eli Peterson. The chief had just returned from a vice squad raid on a massage parlor known as The Pleasure Chest (subsequently it has been renamed) and was standing by the mirror slicking his hair down when E.T. was led into his office.

“So you’re Professor Poogh?... I heard about the lightning. You must be glad to be alive!”

“Yes, sir, I sure am. I’m still pretty shaky. I asked to speak with you because... well... I know you’re going to think this is crazy, but I think the whole town had better be careful...”

“Why’s that?” the chief asked, raising his feet onto his desk as he reclined in his swivel chair and bit into a large red apple.

“Well, strange as this might sound, I think Woland might be responsible for that lightning...”

“You don’t say?...” The chief furrowed his bushy black brows and feigned seriousness as he crunched away at the apple.

“That’s right, sir. I don’t think this is the first time Woland has struck.”

“Do you think we should throw the book at him? Attempted murder with lightning?”

“No, sir, I don’t mean you should press any charges. I just think all of Hogtown should be warned. A civil defense warning or something...”

“Good idea. Don’t worry, Professor Poogh, we’ll send out a bulletin for all Hogtowners to be doubly careful about sudden lightning strikes, falling stars, earthquakes and the like. You just go back to your books and let your mind soar.”

E.T., still unnerved by his recent brush with death, took this promise seriously. “Sir,” he added sheepishly, “I’m late for an important meeting at the college. Would you be so kind as to call me a taxi?”

“A taxi?!”

Within fifteen minutes, three squad cars with sirens whining and lights flashing pulled up to Grimm Hall, where the first meeting on Marmeladov’s tenure had just concluded.

## CHAPTER TWO: HAIL TO THE COLLEAGUES!

Word of Coldburn's misfortune had not reached E.T.'s colleagues as they deliberated over Marmeladov's fate. On the other hand, the rumor of E.T.'s arrest for stalking and sexual harassment had spread like wildfire and the colleagues had decided to convene without him. Now they stood sipping wine and chatting amiably on the usual academic topics: travel money, grants, promotions and a threatened salary freeze. Hörnerträger's wife Helweena (a Czech who teaches French with a charming Slavic accent) and the famous linguist Willard Sully (known as 'Ten Gallon' not so much for his splendid cowboy hat as for the ten-gallon tales he tells about his prodigious physical endowments and sexual prowess) had left the meeting early due to other commitments. Helmut Hörnerträger, Jean Jacques Canin (the Frenchman who teaches Latin and arcane lore), Frau Frau (whose strange name I will explain later), Alfonzo Stableboy (the renowned professor of Portuguese from Cork), Tphutti Nutti (professor of Italian) and Henryk Ikota (the Japanese teacher from Poland) all rushed to the window to see what was causing the commotion. Only Hans Sanderson, descendant of Norwegian Gypsies who teaches sign language, reached for another handful of grapes and cheese squares.

"They must be coming for more evidence -- witnesses, maybe," Hörnerträger speculated, stroking his equine chin. Five faces peered down at the squad cars as each colleague tried to recollect anything that was suspicious or incriminating in E.T.'s behavior.

"Oh, my God! They're bringing E.T.!" gasped Frau Frau as two white hats assisted a balding head from the police car below and quickly escorted it to the doors of Grimm Hall. The bald head seemed to be struggling with an open fly. Feeling faint, Frau Frau sat down and clasped her face in her hands. "I knew he was a pervert, I knew it! And now it's come to this! Oh, God!"

At this point I should explain that Frau Frau has taught German at our college for nearly twenty years. She played an instrumental role in luring Hörnerträger to our school, first establishing collegial contact with him at a West Coast conference in her hotel room and later following through with housewarmings after his arrival. She separated from her lawful husband long ago, but continues to live in his palatial home near the South Marsh. Her skin has the fine, tanned quality of genuine cowhide, and she artfully veils the chicken-skin texture of her lower neck with colorful scarves the way only a woman knows how. Stylish denim jackets and a small but deep scar in her left cheek add to the overall pleasant impression. When she was appointed directoress of Women's Issues, she resolved to make a firm political statement by changing her last name from Mieder to Frau -- hence, the tradition of addressing her as Frau Frau (formerly Frau Mieder). Although she avoids her first name (Helga), her colleagues in the Modern Languages Department often revert back to the pre-Frau-Frau days and use this name in their private conversations.

To regain a measure of calm, she was lighting a cigarette when the door opened and E.T. appeared, flanked by two brawny policemen. "You haven't voted already, have you?" he asked, wringing his hands and drawing closer to his colleagues.

"Get him away from me!" shrieked Frau Frau, leaping to her feet and retreating to the window. "You male chauvinist... pervert!"

Hörnerträger attempted to console Frau Frau's hysteria, but she only whisked his hand from her shoulder and hissed, "Not now!..."

Stableboy tried to bring E.T. up to date: "The vote was seven one and one, E.T." Then he added, "Your fly's down, E.T."

"Seven for or against?"

"Against."

"This is a disaster..."

"There wasn't much choice, E.T. When we heard what Helweena and Helga had to say, it was a cut and dry case. There's no room for that kind of person in our department. Look at his record..."

“A dozen articles, a book?...”

“Articles?! None of it has been published! Wait till you hear all the dirt they’ve got on him, E.T.”

“We can’t wait. Woland’s here! The vote has got to be reversed!” E.T. was frantic.

“Obscenities!” Stableboy whispered, carefully articulating each sound and trying to get E.T. to understand.

E.T.’s face contorted in confusion.

“Obscenities in his classes!” Stableboy whispered again, enunciating each syllable.

“It was only a straw vote, E.T.” Hörnerträger interjected. “But when you hear all the facts, you’ll see it’s hopeless.”

E.T. looked to Frau Frau, who had turned her back on him, gazing blankly out the window and sucking frequently on her Marlboro for solace. There was clearly no sense in trying to talk with her now.

“Where did Helweena go?” he asked.

“She left a while ago with Ten Gallon,” Dr. Sanderson replied.

E.T. lost no time. He swiftly shuffled down the hall in search of the elevator which he rode twice each day. As usual, he headed in the wrong direction and ended up walking almost full circle around the fifth-floor corridor before arriving at the elevator. The two police officers had exited the meeting room with a respectful salute and now stood ready by the open elevator door. Soon E.T. emerged into the nighttime and shuffled past the tower to Kant Hall, attempting once again to dislodge his pants zipper as he shuffled upstairs to Ten Gallon’s office.

Unfortunately, nobody replied when he knocked on Ten Gallon’s door. He decided to search elsewhere. But as he exited Kant Hall, he noticed Sully’s bicycle beside the entrance. “He’s got to be here,” he thought and decided to try again. He climbed the stairs very slowly this time, stopping to wipe the sweat from his brow, and as he proceeded down the dark corridor to Sully’s office he heard what sounded like the squeaking of mice. “Bats, maybe,” he thought as he proceeded closer. But the squeaking ended before he reached Sully’s door, and when he hesitatingly raised his hand to knock, a light suddenly streamed from beneath the door. E.T. instinctively recoiled and

would have beat a hasty retreat if the door had not suddenly opened as a female figure quietly slipped out of the office. When her eye caught E.T. lurking and wringing his hands in the darkness, she grabbed for her poorly buttoned leopard-skin blouse and crouched in horror, expecting to be violently attacked. E.T. raised his hands in a gesture to allay her fears, but to no avail: the flying flames of panic exploded in a horrendous shriek echoed by delicately articulated words of rage: "You maniac! Get away from me! ... Help!!" Only now, amidst the pandemonium, did E.T. realize that the secretive female form was that of Helweena.

Suddenly light flooded the corridor as Ten Gallon came to the rescue, wearing only his underwear and cowboy hat. When he saw E.T., his double chin dropped open, revealing two crooked and broken front teeth. (According to Ten Gallon, he chipped them in a heroic brawl, but I learned from his wife that they were actually broken in an altercation with an electric toothbrush.)

"What the hell?... Have you been eavesdropping?"

"No, Will, I..."

"A peeping Tom on top of everything else! This is all we need!" Helweena lamented and set out down the corridor in a huff. E.T. turned to follow her, but Ten Gallon nabbed him by the sleeve and dragged him into his office, forcibly seating him on a chair by the door. E.T. could hear Helweena's clicking heels as she scurried away down the stairway. Still in his underwear, Ten Gallon straddled a chair opposite E.T., tugging the brim of his cowboy hat lower over his thick beetle brows. Now he remained silent, peering out from beneath that shadow as though to say, "Well, you've really got some explaining to do now!" On the wall overhead, a shiny poster depicted a cyclist doing a wheely on the edge of the Grand Canyon at sunrise -- or maybe it was sunset.

"Will, believe me, I was not eavesdropping," E.T. pleaded.

Ten Gallon continued to eye him silently and implacably.

"Honest, Will, I was looking for you and Helweena to warn you about Woland."

“Just like that time with the co-ed?”

“Will, I never believed her story. I mean, it’s perfectly reasonable that a fellow might feel like removing his shirt or... or...”

“His pants, E.T.?”

“Or loosen his pants on a hot summer day...”

“What about a freezing winter day, E.T.? When your gonads throb like the bells of St. Mary’s?”

“Well, maybe in winter, too, but.... I don’t know about your gonads. I mean, it was summer then. Why are you cross-examining me? I never believed that you were up to any hanky-panky. I defended you.” E.T. sat wringing his hands like a truant schoolboy.

“Never mind. I was just playing devil’s advocate. Forget it.”

“I was passing your office by pure chance that day when she came storming out. I helped get you off the hook.”

“Off the tailhook, right? Forget it, E.T. Just forget it.” A silence ensued, lasting a full minute. Ten Gallon raised the brim of his hat. “Who’s Woland?” he asked.

“He’s...” E.T. leaned closer and whispered: “He’s the power that eternally wills evil but works good.”

Their eyes remained in a silent deathlock that lasted perhaps another minute before the chunky Ten Gallon overpowered his pudgy opponent and wrested his gaze from E.T.’s weakening hold. Ten Gallon looked to the floor and lowered the brim of his hat so that E.T. could see only the sneering grin of Sully’s two broken teeth.

Finally Sully spoke: “You mean the Democratic Party?”

“Will, there could be hell to pay for what you’re doing to Marmeladov.”

“E.T., you’ve heard the preposterous things he’s saying about his book. Something about the biggest discovery in the history of Western civilization. The advent of Elijah in a chariot of fire... The guy’s a crackpot and a religious fanatic.”

“Have you read the manuscript?” E.T. asked.

“...No... Have you?”

“...Not yet. But I wasn’t going to vote against him.”

Both stared at the floor. Finally Ten Gallon broke the silence:

“E.T., you had to hear the things that Helweena and Helga are saying about him. He’s sawn off the limb he’s sitting on.”

“How’s that?... By undressing to seduce a co-ed?”

“Are you trying to imply that I was guilty? Is that what you’re trying to imply, E.T.? Get out of my office!”

At this moment E.T. heard footsteps on the stairs, accompanied by the excited, rapid-fire chatter of Helweena. Ten Gallon quickly slipped into his jeans and boots. E.T. stepped out into the corridor and saw two female college guards emerging from the stairway, followed by Helweena. They were hefty ladies and their holstered pistols moved conspicuously on their broad, heavy hips.

“Dr. Poogh? A complaint’s been filed against you. You’ll have to come with us.”

Within a few minutes, E.T. was being whisked away again in handcuffs by the Hogtown City Police. Sirens wailed halfheartedly, blue and red lights swept the night sky, and a trio of fraternity brothers raced their bicycles in hot pursuit, drawing alongside the squad car and waving to E.T. through the window at each stop sign. It was only a matter of minutes before the rumor of Professor Poogh’s escape from jail and subsequent recapture had spread across campus.

### CHAPTER THREE: BIG OR BIGGEST?

So far, I have based my account mostly on E.T.'s retelling of events, completing the picture as best I can with additional details which I learned from other sources. But on the evening of E.T.'s second arrest, I had the honor of being a firsthand witness to the events that were unfolding. It was about 11:00 P.M. I was sitting on the front porch polishing off a six-pack and listening to the bullfrogs in the marsh across the road when suddenly the phone rang. It was E.T.

"Gabe? Gabe, listen. I don't know how to tell you this, but I'm calling from the slammer..."

"The jailhouse?!" (I had sat home all afternoon and knew nothing as yet about the dramatic events that had transpired that day.)

"Gabe, listen. My brother in Texas has bailed me out with his VISA card. Can you fetch my car and come pick me up? The car's by Grimm Hall."

I often chauffeur E.T. in his Cadillac and even keep a spare set of keys in case of emergencies or urgent errands. He doesn't relate well to mechanical devices and material objects in the real world and is quite content when someone else is at the wheel. The old Cadillac has probably never gone faster than 50 MPH since it was given to E.T. by his brother. I raced to Grimm Hall on my bicycle and then cruised to the jailhouse in the Cadillac.

E.T. was waiting outside when I drove up. His back was turned and the moon gleamed on his bald spot as he rotated his head this way and that, unaware of my arrival. I eased in behind him with the lights off and honked. E.T. jumped and hurried to climb into the car, struggling to fasten his seat belt.

"Gabe," he began urgently, covering his face in his hands, "let's get out of here. I think I've already been seen."

"Professor Poogh, if you were arrested, tomorrow morning the whole town will know, anyway! No need to worry if you've been seen by the jailhouse..." I gunned the engine and we squealed around the corner, heading down Main Street at

45 MPH past the dance hall. We drove out to the West Marsh, where I spotlighted the alligators as E.T. related what had transpired that day. The spawn was unusually abundant that fall and the bull gators reached dimensions never before seen in these parts. Their prehistoric forms stirred amidst the reeds and crisscrossed the black waters incessantly. Toward midnight, E.T. asked me to drive him to Yuri Ilyich, who was living out by the North Marsh.

When we drove up to the old frame house, Yuri Ilyich was sitting in the spacious sun porch, poring over his papers in the lazy light of an oil lamp. He quickly straightened his pink bowtie in his Old World manner and greeted us in the doorway with open arms. His chocolate-colored sport coat sported mouse-colored elbow pads which had worn through together with the coat sleeves themselves so that his bare elbows could be seen beneath both layers of threadbare fabric. His tipsy eyes shone with the oily softness of sherry or spirits. He asked us to sit down, clearing the books and dust from one rickety old chair and whisking a large tomcat from another, and then poured us both a glass of wine. A cockroach explored the base of the wine bottle as we sipped from our glasses. A gray moth kept feeling its way about the wall and porch screen, making occasional forays to the oil lamp. Clusters of pine cones and fir branches hung from nails on the wall and ceiling. A bowl of apples and red grapes lay on the table beside Yuri Ilyich's books and papers. A cold cigar lay in a seashell which served as an ashtray, while a cricket somewhere in the corner strove to out-sing the cicadas in the trees outside. I slapped at a mosquito on my neck.

"That's why this screen, you see? To keep the bugs in!" Yuri Ilyich joked. He smiled and raised his glass. We all drank.

"The fireflies are really thick out here tonight," I noted.

"Earlier this evening that bush over there just seemed to glow, there were so many of them," replied Yuri Ilyich. "Hear the whippoorwill?... He was here last night, too... What a call, eh? You wonder who it's for."

Yuri Ilyich raised his glass and we drank as the whippoorwill called in the treetops. Now and then, distant summer lightning glowed on the horizon above the marsh. The whip-

poorwill flew away and now only the cricket continued his intermittent concert.

“You want I read you my poem?” Yuri Ilyich asked. He had recently begun trying his hand at versifying in English. One poem had just appeared in the *Hogtown Gazette* in the Favorite Recipes section.

“It is from Gumilev, you know, his Tequila period,” Yuri Ilyich explained as he began fumbling through his papers. “It was inspired purely by spirits -- and so was my English translation.”

But then E.T. interrupted him: “Yuri Ilyich, there’s something more important... The department is deciding your tenure, you know, and I really need to know...” E.T. began to wring his hands nervously. “There have been some accusations that you... well, that you have used... well... offensive language in your classes.”

“You mean German?” Yuri Ilyich joked. He offered us a cigar, but we both declined. He lit up a fresh one for himself.

“No,” replied E.T. “Some sort of racy words or... obscenities...”

“E.T.,” Yuri Ilyich responded, “I tell my students that language of obscenities is best suited for the drunken or tipsy states. Its existence is inevitable. If it did not exist, it would have to be invented. Seriously. Judge for yourself. Everyone knows the first thing that happens when you are drunk -- your tongue is tied and trips as it turns in your mouth. But the flow of thoughts and impressions goes ten times faster than normal - - at least, if you are not dead-drunk into shoe soles. And so, naturally, there is need to find suitable language that will answer both these contradictory needs. Such a language they have found in Russia. It is employed throughout the land. It consists of one single noun only that is so easy to understand and pronounce that they do not take trouble to include it in most dictionaries.

“I first realized this one-syllable word could express all thoughts, impressions and even deep reasoning one Sunday evening in Russia many years ago when I came across five drunken workers. One fellow pronounced the word sharply and

with energy in order to express his disagreement and disgust with what other fellow said. Then another fellow replied with same noun, but in completely different tone to signify his total skepticism about first fellow's conclusion. Then a third chap gets disgusted with the first fellow, leaps into discussion with great excitement and yells this same noun once again at the first fellow, only now in the sense that he is "chewing him," as you say in English."

"Chewing him out," I corrected.

"Yes, precisely," Yuri Ilyich continued. "Chewing him out. Then second fellow jumps in once again to take issue with third fellow, who just offended the first guy. But this second fellow now says the same word, as to say: 'Hey, comrade, what for are you flying at him like that? We were having peaceful discussion, and then you come from out of nowhere and start lighting into Filka!' He managed to express this whole thought with that single, very valuable one-syllable noun (although it is true he also raised the hand and grabbed third fellow by the shoulder). But then all of sudden a fourth guy, youngest of them all, seemed to realize that there is simple solution to this argument. He raised his hand and shouted... What you think he shouted? 'Eureka!' you think? 'I found it!' No, he simply repeated that very same expletive, just that one word – spoken with jubilant intonation -- too jubilant, it seems, because fifth fellow, who was somber chap and oldest in group, was not pleased by this young man's youthful fervor and he cut off the young, as you say, 'whippersnapper' in his deep voice, growling out that same one-syllable noun that is never used in ladies' company. Only now his meaning was, 'What are you squawking your head off for?'

"And so, they used only this single favorite word of theirs six times in a row and each understood the other perfectly. This is true story, and I was witness. One old man with beard butted into these workers' conversation. He said, 'You've just said the word ... six times! This is disgrace! You not have shame?'

"They all stared silent at him. Now they will cuss this old man, I thought, but instead of this, youngest fellow turned to

old man and shouted: ‘Why do you say this word the seventh time if you counted it six times already?’”

Yuri Ilyich slowly opened the palms of his hands as though to say, “There you have it!” Then he refilled his wine glass.

I was burning to learn what the magic word actually was, but E.T. resumed his questions before I could ask.

“You mean, you never told your students any Russian obscenities?” inquired E.T.

“What I just told you is what I told my students, E.T.”

“That might help, Yuri Ilyich. That might help.” E.T. removed his crumpled handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his brow and bald head.

I could resist no longer. “Yuri Ilyich,” I asked, “you mean, none of the students asked what the word was?”

“Oh, no, of course they asked!”

“And you didn’t tell them?” I asked.

“Some I told, others I didn’t.”

“How’s that?”

“I told only those who didn’t plug their ears. Those who plugged their ears I didn’t tell.”

“You mean, first you told them to plug their ears if they objected?” I asked.

Yuri Ilyich smiled and winked.

“Yuri Ilyich,” E.T. asked, “couldn’t you have just left that word to their imaginations?”

“Their imaginations are not that clever. Besides, this would not be scientific. And, E.T., if they don’t know that word, they don’t really understand Dostoevsky, do they?” Yuri Ilyich winked as he drew on his cigar.

“??”

“??”

E.T. wiped his sweating neck once again. Then he said, “That’s another matter, Yuri Ilyich. I mean, Dostoevsky. I’m wondering whether there might be some sort of misunderstanding... concerning your claim about Elijah the Prophet... uh... you know, that you’ve made the biggest find in the history of Dostoevsky scholarship.”

“What sort of misunderstanding?”

“Well, I mean, this sort of claim... well, intimidates people sometimes. Maybe you don’t really mean the ‘biggest’ find. Maybe you just mean ‘big’?”

“Well, actually, E.T., I meant ‘biggest.’”

“...Not just... ‘big’?...”

“Hmm... ‘Big’ or ‘biggest’... This is problem?”

“Well, it seems that it is, but if we could convince them that it’s only a misunderstanding... well, maybe that would help.”

“You mean it would help *me*?” Yuri Ilyich grinned.

“Who else?...”

“...You don’t know who else?”

“?”

“The Master, E.T....”

“?”

“Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky! Will it help *him*?”

E.T. was nonplussed. We exchanged glances. I reached for some grapes.

Yuri Ilyich’s face reddened as he continued: “And Ilya Petrovich in *Crime and Punishment*? Must he to retire from police service and play checkers with old men in park? And Nikolai Ilyich Snegiryov and his son Ilyusha? Must they to retire from *The Brothers Karamazov* and surrender only slimelight that ever came to their stinking little neighborhood?”

“Limelight,” I corrected him.

“Yes, precisely. And Ilya Murin? Must he to pack his satchel and head to Wiesbaden so he can have polite conversation with sons and grandsons of German sausagemakers? Or Yegor Ilyich Rostanev and his son Ilyusha? What will they? To move from Stepanchikovo to Paris and set up gambling casino? And what about Yemelyan Ilyich... or Yaroslav Ilyich? Must he to pack up Prokharchin’s bones and to go join carnival act?...”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Editor's note:* Ilya Petrovich, nicknamed 'Gunpowder,' is the assistant police superintendent to whom the murderer Raskolnikov eventually confesses in *Crime and Punishment*. Nikolai Ilyich Snegiryov is a retired army officer in *The Brothers Karamazov*. He is involved in an effort to

“But, Yuri Ilyich, a number of people at the college have problems with your claims about the importance of your idea. They see it as arrogance.”

“E.T., have they read the manuscript of my book?”

“No, they haven’t.”

“Have you read it, E.T.?”

“No, but you’ve told me about it.”

“You must read the manuscript, E.T. Then you will see it is not *my* idea, as you say, but the Master’s. This idea is 100 years old! ...Have another glass.” Yuri Ilyich refilled our glasses and a gloomy silence set in as our host, consumed by thirst, downed his entire glass.

“But listen, you must hear my new poem. Actually it is old poem -- by Gumilev -- but in English. In English it is different, of course, but what can you do?...”

I read despair in E.T.’s eyes. He desperately wanted to help Marmeladov, but the old émigré seemed unaware of the sword that was raised over his head.

“I’d love to hear your poem, Yuri Ilyich,” E.T. said tiredly as Yuri Ilyich fumbled through his messy papers. “But let’s do that some other time.”

Yuri Ilyich accompanied us outside to the car. As I held the car door open for E.T., Marmeladov asked him, “The department has already voted?”

“They’ve begun meeting. They’re voting soon,” E.T. replied.

---

collect on Dmitry Karamazov's debts. His son Ilyusha dies of consumption. Ilya Murin is the stern, enigmatic old man who seems to hold the young heroine captive in *The Landlady*. Yegor Ilyich Rostanev is the expansive, good-hearted hero of *The Village of Stepanchikovo*. On the nameday of his son Ilyusha, he drives out the Mephistophelean antihero, Foma Fomich Opiskin. In the early story "Mr. Prokharchin," Yaroslav Ilyich is the policeman who arrives after the death of Prokharchin and exposes the deceased miser's horde of coins in his mattress. Yemelyan Ilyich appears to be a mystification — or perhaps this is the brother of Yuri Ilyich Marmeladov.

A momentary silence ensued, broken by the cricket's cheery song.

E.T. continued: "Yuri Ilyich, it's awkward for me to ask in these circumstances, but can we keep this conversation strictly confidential? If Hörnerträger finds out, it might mean my job..."

Marmeladov winked and lit up his cigar again.

I drove E.T. home. We said nothing the whole way. I agreed to pick him up first thing in the morning. As E.T. got out of the car, I asked: "What was the mysterious word, anyway?"

"I don't know, E.T. replied. It could all be a lot of hooley." And he slammed the car door.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE EXECUTION

That night E.T. got little sleep. The day's unusual events were unnerving. Maybe the full moon and the heat contributed, too. He lay staring up at his diaphanous bed canopy for over an hour before finally dropping off into sleep.

Suddenly he woke up and found himself inside a carriage. He leaned out his carriage window and saw that he was in a funeral procession. The line of carriages was passing slowly over a narrow bridge, where the dusty road turned uphill to the cemetery chapel. About fifty mourners, dressed in black, followed the hearse on foot. He sat back in his plush seat and tried to recall who had died. Suddenly a top hat with black mourning crepe appeared outside the carriage window. A familiar face peered inside and tipped his hat. It was one of the mourners who was on foot. The carriage lunged forward slightly and the mourner disappeared from view. "Where have I seen him before?" E.T. wondered. Suddenly he realized: it was Dostoevsky! No doubt about it! Then the face appeared in the window a second time. E.T. froze in his seat. When the mourner peered inside and tipped his hat a third time, E.T. jerked the window curtain shut and shouted to the driver to race back to town. He fell to the floor of the carriage as it bounced across the deep wagon ruts. He felt his heart beating like that of a cornered rabbit.

Then he woke up and found himself in a basement tavern. Sunday bells rang in the crisp air outside, but the tavern was filled with cigar smoke and the clinking of glasses, spurs and billiard balls. E.T. sipped his vodka and stared in wonderment at the unfamiliar scene. A young woman in gaudy attire left with a cavalry officer. A boisterous type suddenly grabbed a tipsy client by his thick, red beard and dragged him up the stairs and out into the street. At the next table, a middle-aged man had evidently passed out from drink. His head lay on the table and only stirred from time to time. But then he seemed to regain consciousness, straightening up in his chair and rising to his feet. E.T. thought he looked familiar. The

tipsy stranger bowed to E.T., barely maintaining his balance, and blurted out: “Professor Poogh, allow m-me to introdoosh myself. Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky. Reshently retired!” He leaned on E.T.’s shoulder and bent down to kiss him on the cheek, but E.T. scrambled to his feet and stepped away. Then the stranger sidled closer, mumbling, “Let’s drink Brüderschaft.” But he stumbled against a chair and fell to the floor as E.T. moved to the far side of the table. E.T. could hear the hollow crackle of the stranger’s head as it hit the stone floor like a coconut hitting a cobblestone, and he glimpsed the little stream of blood oozing from the ears before he rushed to the doorway.

But then he woke up and found himself walking quickly along a deserted city square. He was hurrying to get somewhere, but he couldn’t recall just where. As he strained to remember, he suddenly caught sight of a man lying in the middle of the square. As he came closer, he noticed the man was writhing on the cobblestones. He leaned over the convulsive figure and realized it was the same man whom he had encountered in the tavern, only now he was clean shaven. His eyes seemed to float in their orbits and globules of gray saliva bubbled from his mouth as he shook and writhed on the ground. E.T. covered his face in his hands and fled, but as he set off running one eye of the epileptic clearly recognized him. There was no doubt.

But then he woke up. It was a foggy morning. You couldn’t see more than forty yards in the rolling clouds of fog. They were marching in full dress uniform from the barracks. Each carried a musket. E.T. didn’t know how to march, and the captain kept prodding him from behind with his bayonet, which only made marching more difficult. They could hear the roar of a gathered throng, but the cheering multitudes were concealed by the fog. There were five of them. They were told to halt and load their muskets. E.T. didn’t know how to load a musket. He looked at the other soldiers in uniform and was only a little surprised to see that they were Alfonzo Stableboy, Ten Gallon, Tphutti Nutti and Jean Jacques Canin. They payed him no attention and went about their business.

Twenty yards away, a lone man stood by a wall. His hands were tied and a black hood covered his face. To the right, a group of worried figures waited. Some were obviously family and loved ones of the condemned man. E.T. recognized some of them: Nikolai Ilyich Snegirev and his son Ilyusha; Ilya Murin; Yegor Ilyich Rostanev and his son Ilyusha; the fire chief Ilya Ilyich; the tipsy Yemelyan Ilyich; Pavel Trusotsky...<sup>2</sup> To the left, tightly corseted and wearing hoop skirts with enormous bustles, Helweena and Helga angrily urged the musketeers to get on with the execution.

E.T. struggled to load his musket, but the powder spilled every which way from the powderhorn and then the ball kept rolling out the barrel. The captain shouted, "Ready! Aim!..." E.T. fumbled with his musket and the ball rolled to the ground once again. Someone whacked him soundly on the back of his head with the flat of a sword. He winced in pain and turned to see Captain Hörnerträger lower his equine jaw as he shouted, "Fire!" Four muskets rang out, followed by E.T.'s blank shot aimed in the general direction of the condemned man. When the smoke cleared, E.T. could see the dying man struggle to stand on his feet, clutching at his head with his bound hands. But then Helweena and Helga finished him off at short range with a vicious volley of shots from their little pink Derringers, which they had hidden in their fox-fur muffs.

The women and children in the group to the right screamed at the sound of the shots and began to weep hysterically. The men hung their heads in despair. A courier on horseback emerged from the fog carrying a white parchment with a large golden seal. "Am I too late?" he called as he struggled to rein in his white charger. E.T. glanced at his wristwatch, but the hands of Mickey Mouse had fallen loose

---

<sup>2</sup> *Editor's note:* Pavel Trusotsky: a central figure in *The Eternal Husband*. Ilya Ilyich: the fire chief in *The Possessed*, injured while trying to extinguish the fateful Zarechye fire. He flies around town standing (like a chariot rider) in a buggy that is specially outfitted with a strap for him to hold in order to maintain his balance.

and merely rattled about inside the plastic casing. Three soldiers dragged the bloody body closer and removed the hood. The balding head was mutilated by oozing bulletholes, and only one eye remained, but E.T. recognized Dostoevsky's face. For a brief instant before it was drowned in a black jelly that trickled down from the riddled forehead, the single eye recognized E.T., he was sure of it! Aghast, he turned to run, but wherever he turned a bayonet was pointed at him: Captain Hörnerträger and the enlisted men -- Stableboy, Tphutti Nutti, Sully, Canin. Then he woke up.

## CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE CHAPEL

The next day, the faculty turned out for a special service in the college chapel. Few had direct access to updates on Coldburn's fate, and the enigma was further intensified by the manner in which everyone spoke of the service. Some referred to it as a "prayer service," while others spoke of a "memorial service," making it unclear whether the dean was already dead or still clinging to life.

Toward 11:00 A.M. about 100 souls had gathered by the chapel entrance. Precisely at 11:00, the doors were opened and our esteemed men and women of science began to file inside. As is fitting on such solemn occasions, college administrators, wealthy benefactors and other luminaries occupied the first three rows. Even the eminent Jonathan Stoughton and Judge William Corwin had come to pay their respects. The next row was taken by department chairs, who, guided by an inborn sense of propriety peculiar to their rank, gravitated precisely to the row that was allotted to them. The fifth row remained unoccupied, symbolizing the vast rift separating those at the helm from the ordinary deckhands. The worse rows were occupied by the rank-and-file faculty, who filtered into the chapel in motley fashion, some guided by an inborn sense that their place was near the administrators and department heads. Others were guided by no sense at all. Untenured faculty were invited to listen to a live broadcast of the service through a special intercom hookup in the college gym.

As the faculty took their seats, funereal music droned overhead -- a jazz arrangement that was periodically interrupted by a disk jockey who would blurt "Hallelujah" in a rasping bass voice. These interjections raised a few eyebrows in the front rows and elicited muffled snickers in the rear of the chapel. But any traces of optimism were soon dispersed by an elegant black coffin that lay open beside the podium. Large, ostentatious bouquets and wreaths stood roundabout, and the raised lid was adorned with our college banner depicting a

knight in armor perched in a tower surrounded by snapping alligators and with the classic motto *Mens agitat lutum*. Everyone craned their necks to see the body, but the coffin was too high to see inside from the floor below.

Finally, the jazz dirge came to a screeching halt as someone clumsily lifted the needle from the spinning record. Two Shakespearean trumpeters emerged from behind the curtain and played a regal flourish as an unfamiliar figure walked up to the podium. He was dressed in a black cap and gown and his mouth was rather crooked. He was smoothly shaven, with dark hair. His right eye was black, the left was green for some reason. One was higher than the other. E.T. immediately recognized him.

Woland turned to the trumpeters as they disappeared behind the curtain. "Thank you. That was... very nice, very nice." Then he turned to those who had assembled in the chapel. "Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, fellow scientists -- allow me to introduce myself. Woland is my name. President Lombardaki, as you know, is currently in South Africa investing the whole wad, and I have been asked to stand in for Dean Coldburn until he recovers or... whatever. It's unusual, of course, for a visiting researcher to receive this sort of plush appointment, but I assure you that I will not let you down in the fulfillment of my responsibilities. Those of you who were gunning for a deanship," (Woland scanned the first four rows with his right eye), "remember that my appointment is only temporary, so there's still plenty of time. In fact, there's a whole eternity out there. President Lombardaki asked me to pass on this personal message to Dean Coldburn as he... dies there -- I mean, lies there..." Woland unzipped his scarlet-lined gown, extracted a telegram from his coat pocket and read: "Keep a stiff upper lip, Wilbur! We made it through the IRS audit and we can weather this storm, too!"

The audience gave a cheer of solidarity, followed by protracted applause. The cannon and bells of Chaikovsky's 1812 Overture could be heard through the applause, and this seemed to add gale-wind force to the faculty's jubilation. Finally Woland raised his arm and sharply broke the wave of

approbation just as an orchestra director gently but firmly breaks off the final note of the concert. "Wait a minute. There's more. Let's see... 'Tell Betty to send my golf cl...' Ah! Here it is: 'If that bastard Grimm doesn't fork over for a new gym, we'll start billing him for the pink-eye research...' Hmm. '...stiff upper lip...' Well, I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen. I was sure there was something in here about the frontiers of science, about high academic standards, the search for truth, the defense of high ideals... But there doesn't seem to be anything like that in this particular telegram. I'm sorry about that. So let's move on. This is a solemn moment..."

One of the trumpeters emerged from behind the curtain and signalled to Woland, who suddenly realized that he had forgotten another matter: "Oh, yes! First, I must make an important announcement. Last night Frankie Diamond received an offer he couldn't refuse and he was out of here like a bat out of hell. So now I'd like you all to meet Miss Hella, the interim Dean for Women's Issues."

A shapely figure in a black snakeskin miniskirt and green satin blouse stepped out from behind the curtain. Long red hair fell to her shoulders. Her smile resembled a sneer, and a trace of a scar on the side of her neck was the only blemish. She was no spring chick, but the curve of her legs was dizzying, hugged by tight black spike-heeled boots that nearly reached the knees.

Woland continued: "Miss Hella will be working with Frau Frau on -- whatever it is they work on over there in Women's Issues. ...Well, as I was saying, this is a solemn moment in the history of the Magic Kingdom. Lightning has struck in our midst, laying low one of the finest who has ever ascended the steep steps of the Tower. As a token of our gratitude for Dean Coldburn's superb record of service to the college, we have already prepared for him this nice little surprise which you see up here." Hella sidled up to the coffin and began pointing elegantly to each detail, smiling seductively to the audience as Woland continued. "Ladies and gentlemen, this is a custom job. Note the diamond triangle on each side... chrome bumpers, racing stripe. Inside she's got stereo and AC, real leather, cruise control, alarm system, air

bags and bumper-to-bumper coverage for 300 years or till hell freezes over.

“Now, ladies and gentlemen, I want to ask you all to bow your heads and close your eyes... Forget for a moment about that bad review they just gave you, about that raise you think you should have got, about your colleagues who got the raise but shouldn’t have -- let all these worldly cares evaporate for a moment... Have they evaporated?... Just let them rise out of sight like the fog that veils the glorious savannah... Now focus in your mind’s eye on the image of Wilbur Coldburn as you have known him, and I want to ask each of you to note what it is in that image that strikes you. Focus on Wilbur now, everybody... What is it you see?... This will be like a testimonial at an old-fashioned revival.”

As he spoke, Woland stepped down from the podium and strolled down the center aisle, forcefully lowering the heads of any miscreants who hesitated to assume a prayerful posture. “Now, as I call out your name, I want you to tell us what you see. Chillingworth!”

“I see a quiet man, sir,” an obedient voice replied from the middle rows.

“A quiet man?”

“Yes, sir, a man who mostly sits back in his chair and says nothing.”

“That’s certainly the safe thing to do when you have nothing to say... Ellison!”

“I see a man in a suit and tie.”

“Vital qualities! The man is no slouch. Grimes!”

“I see a company man, sir,” chimed a voice from the back rows.

“An asset to the college! Knows when to close ranks and never bites the hand that feeds him. Parkinson! What do you see him doing?”

“I see him holding an umbrella over the President at commencement,” Parkinson replied from the first row.

“Respect and concern for his fellow human beings. Truly admirable! Sanderson! What do you see him doing?”

“I see him racing by in his sports car and splashing me as I pedal my old bike to class through the rain.” This was the

voice of Hans Sanderson, who sat by E.T. Tepid necks of the prayerful craned momentarily to confirm the identity of the mad apostate. Throats gulped moistly throughout the chapel. E.T.'s bald head turned pink, and his hands began to sweat as he fingered his Chinese prayer beads.

"Obviously a busy man!" Woland exclaimed. "Doesn't waste time! When you chop wood, the chips will fly... Sorghum, what do you see?"

An authoritative voice from the first row replied, "I see him congratulating the faculty after they got their 1% raise."

"Yes, a penny saved... He knows the value of the dollar. Margraf!"

"I see him scooping up his own 12% raise, sir. With a backhoe, sir!" replied an eager voice from the rear of the chapel. Necks craned once again as startled eyes swept the back rows like searchlights.

"From each according to his talents, to each according to his needs... Dixon!"

"I see him being patted on the back by President Lombardaki for cutting expenses."

Other voices from the first four rows immediately chimed in: "Amen!"

"Humphreys!"

No reply followed.

"Humphreys!!"

"Sir, I see... I see students sitting in the aisles and on the windowsills. Hordes of students, sir, like locusts, without number. But I don't see Wilbur Coldburn, sir."

"Keep trying, Humphreys," Woland encouraged him.

Another voice from the fourth row volunteered: "I see Wilbur Coldburn announcing the record graduation figures at last year's commencement ceremony! How we broke all the records and exceeded all the quotas."

But then an equally enthusiastic voice followed suit from the middle of the chapel: "I see Wilbur Coldburn driving his sports car down a busy street where young people in caps and gowns work as waiters and messenger boys taxi drivers. Hordes of taxis, sir, yellow cabs without number!"

“It’s not Coldburn’s fault if the economy’s bad!” an angry voice replied from the second row.

“But what if our students don’t know anything when they graduate?” the voice from the middle of the chapel retaliated.

Woland was quick to step in. “Colleagues,” he began in a soothing, velvety voice, “remember now that this is not a public debate. This is only a testimonial about the image that we see in our mind’s eye when we remember the nearly departed.” Woland strolled up to Ms. Emilie Dixon in the first row and began to play on her heartstrings. “Ms. Dixon, when you put it all together, it’s a touching image, isn’t it? The image of a man who moves quietly in the upper echelons but isn’t averse to a little physical labor. A man who eats humble pie but counts his calories and knows how to serve it, too... A wise man who knows better than anybody that one man’s misfortune is another man’s boon.”

Ms. Dixon quietly cried alligator tears. “Yes,” she sobbed, “I only wish he were here with us! The poor man!...”

Woland handed Ms. Dixon a lace handkerchief, which he produced as if by magic from the palm of his hand. “You know, Ms. Dixon, I’m sure there’s no place he’d rather be, too! Well, do I have a surprise for you! Come over here with me!” Woland helped Ms. Dixon from her seat and escorted her to the coffin.

“Look inside, Ms. Dixon! Your wish come true!”

Suddenly the chapel was rent by Ms. Dixon’s blood-curdling scream followed by the exclamation, “He’s dead!!! Ah-h-h-h!” Ms. Dixon squeezed her horrified old face between her clenched fists as she gazed into the coffin.

Woland reached into the coffin and raised the torso of Dean Coldburn by the coat lapels, one of which was adorned with a red rose. Plastic tubes protruded from his nose. A general groan swept through the chapel, punctuated by scattered screams. Miss Hella escorted the shaken Ms. Dixon back to her seat as Woland continued:

“Oh, no, Ms. Dixon, let’s not get ahead of ourselves. He’s not all that dead. It’s not that serious, really. It’s just one of those little three-day comas. Ladies and gentlemen, don’t

get excited. As you see, the life support system is intact and trained paramedics are on hand to intercede if the need arises.”

Two odd figures emerged from behind the curtain. Beneath their white medics’ attire one could discern a gangly chap nearly seven feet tall and wearing a cracked pince-nez. He wore a jockey cap and checkered pants which only reached his calves. In the other strange figure the discerning eye could make out a huge black tomcat about four feet tall and with well-groomed whiskers. Each fellow peered from beneath a round medic’s mirror affixed to his forehead as they marched up to the coffin and gaily raised two large oxygen bottles that were attached to the plastic tubes in Coldburn’s nose. Unfortunately, the tall fellow allowed the bottle to slip from his hand and fall to the floor with a loud clang. A moan poisoned the air in the chapel as the hollow metal bottle bounced across the hardwood podium and tumbled down into the center aisle, hissing as it rolled along. The lanky giant scrambled to recover the oxygen bottle and together with the big tomcat they struggled to reattach the plastic tubing. Meanwhile, Woland resumed his speech:

“Yes, ladies and gentlemen, we knew that being here with you today was as much Wilbur’s desire as that of Ms. Dixon, so we’ve pulled out all the stops in order to make this reunion possible. We want Wilbur to know how we feel about him, so we spared no expense in order to prepare this surprise for him. Of course, if ol’ Wilbur pulls through (and the devil only knows, with your help maybe he will), he may not need this cozy, custom-designed memento of our concern just now, but maybe next week or next year?...”

As Woland spoke, the eccentric twosome continued their life-and-death struggle. The tomcat fetched a huge bellows and pumped with all his might into the open coffin, evidently into the mouth of the nearly departed. Then the lanky, checkered fellow received two rods from the Shakesporean trumpeters and inserted them into the coffin. As he held them there and squeezed, the lights went dim in the chapel -- a strange phenomenon because the rods were not connected to any visible wires. Then, suddenly, the darkened chapel was shaken by a deafening zap as a plume of blue sparks shot up like

fireworks from Coldburn's coffin. Screams rang out. Many faculty rose from their seats. Some buried their faces in their hands, others lunged for the exit in horror, but the exit was locked to keep the untenured faculty and students out of the chapel. The first explosion was followed by consecutive explosions, each with a different colored plume of sparks. Bats could be heard flitting to and fro beneath the high ceiling. Finally, the lights slowly came back on, illuminating the last frantic efforts of the weird medics, who, realizing they were now in the spotlight, suddenly slammed the coffin lid shut and smiled sheepishly at the outraged throng.

"There, you see?" Woland resumed. "Everything is under control. Let's all give Dean Coldburn a hand for making this appearance at such a difficult time and for being such a good sport."

Woland, the strange medics, Miss Hella and the Shakespearean trumpeters all applauded, joined by a few confused faculty, most of whom began to reclaim their seats, guided by the same inborn sense or lack of sense which guided them to their seats when they first arrived. The medics and trumpeters then attempted to lift the coffin, one at each corner, but it proved too heavy. The tomcat fetched a chainsaw from behind the curtain and proceeded to saw the coffin straight down the middle. Splinters flew, followed by blood and then more splinters as the saw cut down to the floor. Screams and cries of "Oh my God!" resounded among the audience. The faculty's horror knew no bounds.

"Don't worry, ladies and gentlemen, it's an old trick -- older than the hills!..." Woland consoled the audience as the fellows carried the two coffin halves backstage, one at a time. "Well, that concludes today's program! Don't forget the annual Teaching Awards Telethon tomorrow night! Channel 13! We'll be watching!..." The lights came on bright and music began to blare ("When the Saints Come Marching In") as the faculty and administrators marched out of the chapel.

## CHAPTER SIX: COLLEGIAL OBLIGATIONS

E.T. and Hans Sanderson went to the bar to gather their thoughts. They ordered a pitcher of beer. Both hesitated to speak, rather shaken by the spectacle they had just witnessed. Hans was sincerely nonplussed. He struggled to grasp how anyone could pull off such a convincing magic show and why they would undertake such a stunt in the tragic context of Coldburn's "ordinary little coma." E.T. found new confirmation for his suspicions that dark powers were meddling in the affairs of the college, but he hesitated to broach this topic. Hans downed half a mug of beer before he began:

"That was quite a show. Who was the joker in the cat costume, I wonder? Talk about black humor!..."

E.T. just stared at Hans blankly. Finally, after a long pause, he replied: "That was no costume, I'm afraid."

Hans shrugged this off as he poured himself a second drink: "Go to the devil..."

E.T. continued his blank stare, as though waiting for Hans' logical circuits to warm up.

"Wonder how they pulled off those explosions... That coffin must have been wired."

"There were no wires," E.T. paused, probing Hans with his worried eyes. "Woland was there by the creek when Coldburn got zapped by lightning..." Then, after another long pause: "He caused the lightning, Hans. I was there."

"Come on, E.T., you're joshin' me!"

E.T. took a drink and remained silent. Dr. Sanderson gazed into his mug of amber beer. Suddenly, for a brief moment as the thin foam dissipated, an ugly face with a protruding fang and a walleye grinned at him from the amber surface of the ice-cold brew. Hans winced and shook his head before peering into the mug once again. Fortunately, the leering face was now gone.

A moment later, an ambulance drove up to the bar with lights flashing and siren blaring. Then the siren was turned off

and two paramedics entered the bar. The light on the ambulance continued to rotate, painting the bottles, brass and mugs red as it whisked across the barroom. The discerning eye recognized in one paramedic that very same tomcat who had assisted Woland. The other, needless to say, was the towering, lanky chap in checkered trousers and jockey cap. They sat down at the bar alongside E.T. and Dr. Sanderson.

Hans couldn't believe his eyes. The bartender served the odd newcomers suspiciously, as though doubting that they would leave a tip. The bar was half empty, but those customers who were halfway sober lowered their beer mugs and eyed the queer ambulance crew. Hans leaned close to E.T.'s ear.

"So, you're suggesting he's... *him*, and these are... *his* helpers?..."

"It's *him*, Hans. No doubt about it. As sure as you've got eyes in your head. And when Coldburn got zapped, the topic was Marmeladov and Dostoevsky... Have you read Marmeladov's manuscript?"

"How could I read it?! I don't read Russian!... Nobody else has read it, have they?" A note of uneasiness flickered in Hans' eyes. "...Have you read it?"

"?"

"Then what are you asking me for? Why don't you read it?"

"?"

"Well?"

"I can't read Russian that fast. We've got the meeting this afternoon and I've got classes. The vote will be in the morning. And besides, even if I should read it -- let's say I'm convinced. But that doesn't necessarily mean Marmeladov is right. And what if I disagree? Who's to say?..."

"...Yeah, we need a better way, of course. Maybe the outside referees?"

"Fat chance! Hörnerträger and company hand-picked half of them," replied E.T.

"...Hey, I've got it! We could just pretend that we've read it! We can cook up our own defense!"

“But even for that there isn’t much time. And what if...”  
E.T. seemed to swallow a large ice cube as he pondered a grave thought.

“?”

“What if one of them has somehow... gone through it after all?... Unlikely as that may seem...”

Their eyes interlocked but peered far away into the dark, uncharted and frightening realm of remote possibilities. Finally Dr. Sanderson broke the silence:

“...True. Unlikely, of course, but conceivable, I guess. ...There has to be some other way...”

The strange paramedics rose from their barstools and headed for the door, but not before the tall one interjected a friendly piece of advice, winking through his broken pince-nez: “Try a fortune-teller, Dr. Sanderson!” These warm words of advice were followed by a warm pat administered on Hans’ back by the enormous tomcat as he passed by.

A cold shiver ran down Hans’ back and his eyes bulged in fright and shock as the odd twosome exited the bar. He began to hiccough.

“Now that was definitely a cat’s paw! No doubt about it! ...And did you see the eyes? That’s no costume, E.T.!”

Both professors watched through the window as the odd medics climbed back into their ambulance, turned on their siren and slowly drove away.

“A fortune-teller!” exclaimed E.T.

“?”

“Hans, that’s it! We could consult a clairvoyant to find out whether Marmeladov’s theory isn’t just a lot of crock.”

“Sam Goun claims his great aunts are both clairvoyants. He swears by ‘em. Always phones ‘em before he buys his lottery tickets.”

“That’s it! We could visit one of them!” E.T. agreed.

“No, wait -- we could visit both of them to compare results.”

“What if one calls the other between our seances?”

“I know! Why don’t you visit one and I’ll go see the other? At the same time! That way we’ll definitely have independent results.”

By late afternoon, Hans Sanderson and E.T. had learned that Ellie and Nellie Belmo, Sam Goun's great aunts, lived in Jupiter and Zephyr Hills, respectively. At 82, the two twin sisters continued to eke out a meager existence by luring in gamblers who hoped to strike it rich and lonelyhearts who hoped to strike a sympathetic chord in a kindred soul. Hans and E.T. tossed a coin to decide who would visit Ellie and who would consult with Nellie. As fate would have it, it was E.T.'s lot to visit Ellie, who lived a considerable distance away. He decided to fly to Jupiter and reserved an evening flight. Hans would drive E.T.'s Cadillac to Zephyr Hills and then meet him at the airport late in the evening. But meanwhile there was the second departmental meeting on Marmeladov's tenure and promotion. This meeting proved to be especially crucial in deciding Yuri Ilyich's fate.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN

Phones were already ringing when E.T. and Hans arrived for the meeting in Hörnerträger's office. As usual, they were a little late -- a genetically determined flaw that continually earned them demerits with the German chairman, who understood extremely little about genetics. An impressive pair of deer antlers hung on the wall over the chairman's plush leather chair. Stableboy was manning the fax machine, cutting off the pages with scissors as the messages emerged from the slot in the front of the machine. Frau Frau manned the auxiliary phone, taking frequent notes as she listened. Hörnerträger, Helweena and Ikota sat listening to the speaker phone. Hörnerträger and Helweena were taking copious notes, while Ikota mostly just sat and listened. Sully and Jean Jacques Canin sat at the computer and listened to the phone messages, simultaneously printing out brief messages that came in through electronic mail.

Specially for Marmeladov, who had always been a strict grader throughout his days at the college, Hörnerträger had devised a new method of evaluating teaching. All the colleagues agreed that it was an ingenious idea based on all the latest electronic technology. Names had been chosen at random from the computer, and letters had been sent out to 100 of Yuri Ilyich's present and former students inviting them to phone, fax or e-mail into the office on this afternoon between 3:00 and 4:00. Complete anonymity was assured. Students were asked to give their opinions of Marmeladov's instructional skills in order to help assess his fitness to continue teaching at the college. By 2:30 the phones began ringing, and the colleagues had already been at their battle stations for at least twenty minutes when E.T. and Hans arrived. Hörnerträger motioned with his pencil to two chairs at opposite ends of the room (his usual tactic of divide and conquer). E.T. and Hans dutifully took their seats and listened to the plaintive voice that reverberated in the Hansel and Gretel stereo phone speakers that stood smiling on the bookshelf, happy to be out of the dark

forest and securely molded into a snug and plastic universe. Hansel spoke the low tones, while Gretel passed along the higher tones.

“Like he thinks we’re all Russian majors,” Gretel complained. “He doesn’t understand that we have five other subjects at the same time. Not all of us really want to learn a foreign language, you know? He can’t understand this. He expects too much from us and then lights into us when we haven’t lived up to his crazy expectations.”

Helweena struggled to take notes fast enough. “Has he ever engaged in any inappropriate behavior in class?” she asked.

“Well, I’ve heard that he has. I mean, some people say so,” Gretel replied.

“Okay, thank you for phoning in,” Helweena said before Hörnerträger pressed the “off” button. Immediately the phone buzzed as another student phoned to give more testimony.

“I’d like to say something about Professor Marmeladov,” Gretel began. “His classes are filled with constant obscenities and sexual innuendo.” Two pencils belonging to Hörnerträger and his wife began racing across the notebook pages. “He made indecent references to women’s ‘tails’ and he constantly speaks of little girls in his drills. ‘What a beautiful little girl!’ ‘Little girl’ this and ‘little girl’ that... The man’s a sexist if there ever was one!”

“Shit!” Helweena hissed as her pencil point broke at this critical moment. Ikota handed her his pen.

Gretel continued: “He puts women down and his grading is unfair. I mean, really unfair. It’s like nothing you’ve ever seen, you know what I mean?”

“Does he accost his female students?” Hörnerträger inquired.

“He even kisses them!”

“My goodness,” Helweena commented as she took notes.

“Speaking for a lot of other students, I think you should get rid of Professor Marmeladov. He’s a freaky guy and he gives me the creeps.”

“Thanks for calling in,” Hörnerträger replied. “Rest assured that we will take your comments most seriously.”

Frau Frau stood and listened to this caller during a hiatus in the calls she was receiving over the other phone. "Sounds like more of the same. Look at the comments I've been getting." She laid three sheets of paper on the table. Hörnerträger read the comments out loud: "Dirty old man." "He makes it impossible to do well." "Fire Marmeladov!" "He ridicules homosexuals and the handicapped." "Needs to shave more often." "Best teacher I've..." "He's inflexible. He doesn't understand that most of us are taking Russian only as a college requirement, not because we want to speak it perfectly." "He used a sexual innuendo -- something about women having a 'tail'." "Unorganized. No regular schedule for quizzes. He keeps changing the syllabus." "Worst teacher I've had." "Professor Marmeladov really makes you want to learn..." "Needs to bathe more often." "The guy's an alcoholic." "A sadist."

Then Hörnerträger switched on Hansel and Gretel, whose lights had been blinking for over a minute. Hansel spoke up:

"Hello? I'd like to say a few words in support of Professor Marmeladov. I know people are trashing him and all that, but I learned more in his class than in all my other Russian classes combined. They say he's an unfair grader, but I thought he was fair if you worked."

Helweena asked, "Did you ever see any sexual harassment or anything of that sort?"

"No, there's some talk going around, but I never actually saw anything."

"Thanks for phoning in." Hörnerträger switched off the phone again and looked at his watch. When Sully and Stableboy reported that the faxes and e-mail messages looked much the same, Hörnerträger decided that there was doubtless enough evidence to judge Marmeladov's teaching. After all, in addition to these messages, they also had the evaluations which the students completed at the end of each semester. Hörnerträger suggested that they try to come to a consensus concerning the question of teaching quality.

“Well,” Helweena began, “I am afraid there is only one possible conclusion. Yuri Ilyich has been very unprofessional. As Helga and I said yesterday, this is not the first time we are hearing these complaints from his female students.”

“And some of the male students as well,” Frau Frau added.

“You mean he’s been fondling the boys now?” Hans asked.

“No,” replied Frau Frau, “but Mary Indelicado, who works over in my office, took Yuri’s class and she says there’s innuendo. Her boyfriend agrees. He was in the class, too. And I had at least two male callers who confirmed these sorts of accusations.”

“The only conclusion is that Yuri Ilyich will have to go,” Helweena stated emphatically.

The room was now silent as the phones had been turned off and the fax and computer printer were no longer humming. Hansel and Gretel waited optimistically on the shelf.

“Yes, it’s disgraceful! The man just doesn’t get it. He’s still living in another era,” Helga agreed and poured herself some coffee.

E.T. decided he had to speak out. “Helga, I asked Yuri Ilyich if he had used any obscenities in his classes. He said that he only told a tale about how a single Russian obscenity has a dozen different meanings, depending on how it’s used.”

“What word is it?” inquired Tphutti Nutti.

“Well, I didn’t ask,” E.T. replied hesitantly.

“E.T., you’re a professor of Russian! If the word’s that useful, don’t you think you should know it?” Ten Gallon joked.

“There, you see? A sexual term!” Frau Frau snapped, ignoring Ten Gallon. “He didn’t have to talk about the word. He *chose* to talk about the word. Was it absolutely necessary that he raise the topic?”

E.T. squirmed as he replied. “Well... probably not. Maybe he just thought it was interesting.”

“Then, even if he didn’t use any dirty words, it’s still sexual innuendo. He had no business raising a sexual topic if it’s not vital to the course of study. He’s got to learn to stop

forcing his own sexuality upon the people around him. This kind of behavior is intimidating and offensive to women.”

“Not only to women,” Stableboy added.

“Even if it was vital to the topic, he’s not supposed to mention an obscenity,” Helweena argued.

“But he was only answering the students’ question,” E.T. protested. “And first he told them they could plug their ears if they wanted.”

“Some students may feel too intimidated to plug their ears -- and leave them wide open against their convictions,” Helweena argued. “Peer pressure, you know.”

“Ear pressure?” Hans asked, confused.

“Peer pressure,” Helweena repeated. “Besides, he’s still creating a hostile atmosphere.”

“Is he?” E.T. asked. “It seems to me that others are creating a hostile atmosphere by making these accusations... And there’s nothing about sexual innuendo in any of these semester evaluations which the students have filled out over the past three years.”

“That may be so,” Helweena replied, “but that doesn’t mean it wasn’t there.”

“That’s right, E.T.,” Hörnerträger added. “You’re referring to negative evidence.”

“But some of the students defend Marmeladov. Isn’t that positive evidence?”

“Look,” Stableboy interjected, “both sides can’t be right. One side is right and the other isn’t.”

“That’s right,” Helga agreed. “There was sexual innuendo.”

“Wait a minute, let’s be rational here and not too extreme,” Hörnerträger advised in a fatherly tone. “The truth is invariably somewhere in between.” He paused weightily to give the colleagues a moment to see the light at the end of the labyrinth. He rose from his swivel chair and stepped over to the phone speakers. “Hansel says one thing and Gretel says another. There’s doubtless truth in both sides here, but the truth is somewhere between them.” And he raised a jade paperweight (a green dragon) from the shelf below and placed it

between Hansel and Gretel to illustrate a truth so obvious that only a total Dummkopf could fail to grasp it.

“That’s right,” Helga chimed in, “and it’s closer to Gretel.” She reached out and moved the dragon next to Gretel.

“And if it is anywhere in between, well, I am afraid the truth is just awful, wouldn’t you agree, Alfonzo?” Helweena argued.

“Yes, I’m afraid so,” Stableboy lamented.

All remained silent, including Hansel and Gretel, who seemed to eye nervously the coiling serpent who had come between them.

“So,” continued Hörnerträger, “have we reached some sort of consensus regarding this aspect of the question -- that is, Marmeladov’s teaching?”

“I’m afraid so,” Canin replied.

“Unfortunately,” said Sully.

“So, how does the department feel on this question? How many of you believe Marmeladov is guilty?”

All raised their hands except E.T. and Hans. Hansel and Gretel, of course, were not voting members of the faculty, but they had already had their say. Seeing that he was almost alone beneath a circle of raised hands, Hans hesitatingly raised his hand -- but only shoulder-high, as though by a genetic fluke his arm were shorter than the arms of his colleagues and, therefore, counted for less than a full-fledged vote. However, the chairman understood very little about genetic defects of the extremities and counted Sanderson’s partial vote as a full vote.

“Very good. I will make a notation...” Hörnerträger began, but he was interrupted by E.T.

“Listen, everybody. Helweena and Helmut, I realize that you hate Yuri Ilyich with a passion. Why this happened, I can’t say. Maybe he insults you when I’m not around or just doesn’t assent to your ideas. Helga, I realize you think you have to defend downtrodden womanhood, but listen to me. As God is my witness, the Devil is meddling in the affairs of this college. The future of this institution -- and maybe our lives as well -- are at stake. Coldburn was just the first victim. If you have no fear of God, well... at least fear the Devil.”

There was a long silence as the colleagues pondered E.T.'s warning. Dewy eyes beneath furrowed brows gazed blankly into the dark tabletop and then bulged somewhat as they turned to the equine visage of the department chair. Thus brightly colored, lop-eared pansies look up from their flower box to the golden face of the rising sun as frowning storm clouds roll in from the west.

Finally Hörnerträger resumed: "So, as I stated, I will make a notation that on this point nearly all the colleagues agree. Marmeladov's teaching has been unprofessional at times and, alas, far from meritorious. And I shall make a notation that only Professor E.T. Poogh disagrees, arguing that supernatural forces are on the side of Marmeladov."

"Wait a minute!" E.T. pleaded. "Shouldn't we evaluate Yuri Ilyich's teaching by some other criteria besides what students say about him? How about peer review?"

"What do you think we are doing today, E.T.?" Hörnerträger replied. "We are his peers and we are evaluating him."

"But we're using student reports!"

"Yes, but this is part of the peer evaluation process nevertheless. It's official policy."

E.T. felt helpless, especially when Hans had deserted his camp in the eleventh hour. Hörnerträger reminded everybody that the third and final meeting on Marmeladov's tenure would be the next morning at 11:00. That meeting would be devoted to the question of Marmeladov's qualities as a scholar and researcher. All the evaluations by outside scholars had now arrived and Hörnerträger laid them on his desk for the faculty to examine. Sully and Stableboy leafed through them, but found no familiar names and soon laid them aside. E.T. and Hans began to read them, but they found only the formulas that are usual for such evaluations, including many generalizations and exceedingly little that was specific and concrete. Besides, each secretly knew that there was a much quicker shortcut to the truth, and this inner knowledge made these outside reviews seem even more futile and irrelevant.

Within a few minutes, all had left Hörnerträger's office under various pretexts (pick up the kids, make it to the bank,

clean the swimming pool), leaving the chairman alone amidst his papers. He worked into the evening beneath the deer antlers tabulating the results of his department's high-tech survey. In his summary of the students' testimony, he weighed each word carefully, rewriting again and again in order to give his report the maximum semblance of objectivity while crossing out Marmeladov's chances in the most lethal fashion. The words marched across the page in neat, uniform echelons. It was the culmination of over two years of maneuvering, the final advance in a 900-day campaign to outflank the hated enemy, blockade his lines of communication and starve him into oblivion. The unrelenting campaign had paid off. Victory was now at hand. He left Grimm Hall at precisely 7:13, satisfied with a job well done and relishing the final pincer movement which he planned for tomorrow.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: GRANDMA TOLD IT BOTH WAYS

A fiery sunset blazed over the gulf as we drove E.T. to the airstrip that evening. The plan was for Hans to head for Zephyr Hills after E.T. took off to Jupiter by plane. Then Hans would meet him at the airstrip after both returned to Hogtown late that same evening. E.T. asked me to chauffeur Hans to Zephyr Hills because Hans was in the habit of falling asleep at the wheel. In his heyday he had totalled an Edsel, a Rambler and a school bus. Car insurance was now beyond his means.

We arrived at the airstrip just in time. The dashing pilot had already cranked the propeller and was spit-shining his goggles, preparing for takeoff. Catching sight of E.T. as he waddled toward the airplane, the pilot climbed down and helped E.T. into the rear seat. We watched from the car as E.T. struggled to get his goggles to fit around his head. Before taking off, the pilot waved a packet of papers to the control tower, where a Civil Air Patrol volunteer stood ready with a bullhorn. The volunteer spoke into the bullhorn, but nothing could be heard due to the roaring of the engine. The pilot then lowered his goggles and raised two thumbs to the tower.

“That means he’s ready,” Hans translated. (He specializes in sign language and never misses an opportunity to practice his skills.)

The Civil Air Patrol volunteer waved an open hand at the pilot.

“That means ‘okay, see you later,’” Hans translated.

Sure enough, the single-engine biplane set out bounding down the dirt runway and finally took flight just beyond the point where the clods and potholes of the airstrip give way to the smooth, flat surface of the clover field. The veteran pilot barely cleared the oak trees at the end of the field, deftly nipping off a few twigs with his rear wheel. Relieved that E.T. was safely on his way, we set out for Zephyr Hills.

As we drove, Hans explained the reason for the evening sortie to visit two clairvoyants. I remarked that their actions

were testimony to true collegial devotion and that they were going above and beyond the call of duty.

“We sure as hell are,” Hans replied as he adjusted his seat backwards and closed his eyes for the hour-long drive.

Then I was struck by a sudden realization. “Hey,” I asked, “why don’t you just read his book?”

“It ain’t that simple, Gabe,” Dr. Sanderson explained in a calm, level-headed voice, lifting a Mars bar from his shirt pocket without opening his eyes. “This is science, understand? In science you’ve sometimes got to cut straight through to the core. You’ve got to get to the bottom of it all fast. Sometimes science can’t wait forever, understand? That’s when heads start to roll. That’s when you walk into the laboratory and find your two-headed dogs and your Frankensteins. Sometimes you’ve got to be on the cutting edge of science, know what I mean?”

I confess that I didn’t really understand as we drove down the highway that night, but since that night I have given Dr. Sanderson’s words much careful thought and now realize that I still have no idea what he was trying to say, if anything.

I asked him whether it is true, as they say, that you have to churn out books and articles like a maniac in order to survive in academia. Dr. Sanderson replied, chewing on his Mars bar, again without opening his eyes:

“It’s true, Gabe. Publish or perish. That’s one way they have of trashing you when they don’t like you. By saying you haven’t published enough.”

“Do all the faculty in the department have lots of publications?”

“Tphutti Nutti has a big fat book coming out -- about the life and work of some Italian who wrote about the lives and works of a dozen Kraut writers. Frau Frau has her groundbreaking book about the nicknack collection of some Austrian author whose name I can’t remember.”

“Why is it groundbreaking?”

“Because the whole damned edition should be plowed under with a John Deere tractor.” He crumpled the candy bar wrapper in his fist and flicked it onto the back seat.

“Not with a Belorus?”

“It ain’t the American way, Gabe. It’s got to be a John Deere. Believe me. I’ve given it a lot of thought. ...Then there’s Stableboy with his book on past active participles in fifteenth-century Portuguese. Now he’s coming out with volume two: past passive participles in fifteenth-century Portuguese. Ikota just did a review of a Polish cookbook. He calls himself an iconoclast, and he has this theory that education should be practical -- otherwise it makes no sense to dump tax dollars into the schools.”

“What about Hörnerträger?”

“Hörnerträger? He’s the editor of *Über alles*. That makes him king of the sausage, Gabe. He makes ‘em and breaks ‘em. If he doesn’t like you, he can ensure that your work is rejected. So all the sausage eaters kiss his ass.”

“But there must be other ways for them to turn?...”

“Not if they want to eat sausage.”

“But what about science? I mean, if someone has an idea that’s demonstrably sound...”

“Build a better mousetrap and the world will make a beaten path to your door, right? That may be true, Gabe, in chemistry or engineering or any of the applied sciences where the results of a theory are there for everyone to see. But literary criticism? Who reads it? A few graduate students at best. The world doesn’t care, Gabe. Nobody’s watching. Your Hörnerträgers can get away with anything.”

“But there’s other journals you can turn to, right?”

“Right, Gabe. But there are other Hörnerträgers and they’re all pals, understand? They and their friends -- it’s like a country club or a fraternity, you see? They’re all scrambling for plums -- grants, pay raises, promotions -- and they rely on one another for support, for positive book reviews, for glowing letters of recommendation, for favorable grant proposal evaluations. There are only so many plums to go around, and they understand this better than anyone. They’ll accept an occasional outsider, but only when this will help them pluck one of them plums. Outsiders are usually helpless, unempowered people. There’s no rational reason to let them into the fraternity. It might be the honorable and charitable

thing to do, but it isn't rational because it means sharing more plums with others. See what I mean?"

"Do colleagues usually read each other's work?"

"Naw, this is an age of specialization, Gabe. You can't cover all the bases."

"Well, how do you judge someone's work, then, if you don't read it?"

"Usually it's pretty clear anyway, Gabe, if you keep your ear to the ground. You know -- if you listen to what people are saying." Dr. Sanderson yawned.

Then curiosity got the best of me: "What about you, Dr. Sanderson? Have you published any books?"

Alas, fatigue had finally overwhelmed Dr. Sanderson. He appeared to be dozing. I continued to ponder Marmeladov's fate as we drove along in silence. By now, night had set in and the summer lightning frolicked quietly in distant clouds over the gulf.

When we arrived in Zephyr Hills, Nellie Belmo was easy to find. The billboards with the crystal ball directed us straight from the highway to the fortune-teller's residence. We pulled in behind her little electric car, which was parked in the carport and plugged into an outlet in the side of the house by the doorway.

Nellie was about four feet tall and slightly hunched. Her parlor was small and dark, illuminated only by the neon sign in the window and a single electric candle that flickered on the table beside an electric crystal ball that seemed to glow in the candlelight. Nellie seated us at the table and served tea and fortune cookies. A large tabby eyed us skeptically from atop the VCR. Business had been slow and Nellie seemed happy for the company.

"So, what is it in your future that you boys need to know?"

"Actually, Miss Belmo, it's something in the past," Dr. Sanderson replied.

"Well, if it's not too long ago maybe I can remember," said Nellie.

"It's about 150 years ago, Miss Belmo."

"Oh, land, that's further than I can remember."

“But you’re a clairvoyant, aren’t you? You can see into other realms?”

“Well, actually I’m a fortune-teller. I mean, I tell fortunes. You want me to tell you your *past*?”

“Not mine, Miss Belmo. We want you to tell us about what’s in a book -- whether it’s true. The book was written by a man named Marmeladov over in Hogtown. It’s about a fellow named Dostoevsky, who lived over a century ago. We just need to know whether the book is right or wrong.”

Nellie eyed us both suspiciously. A moth flitted across the ceiling. “This Dusty fellow -- was he a cowboy?”

“No, Miss Belmo, he was a famous writer. Have you read *Crime and Punishment*, about an axe murder of an old pawnbroker and her kid sister?”

“...You boys aren’t in trouble with the law, are you?”

Dr. Sanderson was already beginning to lose patience. “Not yet,” he replied, “but we’ll be desperados if we don’t get the information we need...”

I cracked open my fortune cookie to break the tension which seemed to set in momentarily. Dr. Sanderson cracked his, too, and the tension seemed to dissipate.

“Look, Miss Belmo,” Dr. Sanderson pleaded, “if you can talk with this guy up here (he indicated a glitzy portrait of Elvis Presley gazing suavely from the wall), then surely you can talk with Dostoevsky. Right?”

“Can you pay cash, Dr. Sanderson?” she asked politely, cocking her head slightly.

Dr. Sanderson looked at me.

“Uh, I’m paying,” I interjected, suddenly recalling that Dr. Sanderson parts with cash like a child parts with a candy bar. “Sure, we’ll pay cash.” I reached for my wallet. “How much will it be?”

“It depends on whether I can find him and whether he gives us the information you need. It could be only \$49.95 -- that’s for the basic service. Then, if we get half of what you need, another \$49.95 will be due.”

These prices seemed pretty steep to me, but E.T. had promised he would reimburse me for all expenses including

gas, beer and speeding tickets. Dr. Sanderson wanted to haggle, but I cut him off and agreed to Nellie's fees.

"So," Nellie continued, "you need to know if a book about this Dusty..."

"Dostoevsky," Dr. Sanderson prompted her.

"Dusty Ifsky... whether this book is right or wrong. And the gentleman who wrote it is Mr. Marmalade?"

"Marmeladov. He teaches Russian in the Magic Kingdom."

"Now this Dusty Ifsky -- how will I recognize him if I see him?" Nellie asked.

"Well," replied Dr. Sanderson, "he has a high brow and a thin beard and he has a serious look in his eyes."

"Sunken cheeks," I interjected.

"That's right. He wears dark suits -- you know, like they wore a hundred years ago. He's real serious, not the kind of guy you'd invite over for the Super Bowl."

Nellie refilled our teacups and sipped her tea. "Nobody has ever asked about him before, not as long as I've been doing business here in Zephyr Hills." She continued to contemplate. "Do you think he ever made it into *Reader's Digest*?"

Dr. Sanderson shrugged. Lightning flashed somewhere in the distance and thunder rumbled. All grew quiet. Then suddenly Dr. Sanderson leaped halfway to his feet as an errant bat or bird whisked the window with its wings and flew away. As Nellie sipped her tea, we heard a creaking sound that seemed to come from the attic and sounded like slow heavy footsteps. We both sat motionless as we eyed the ceiling and listened closer.

Nellie was apologetic: "Oh, don't worry, that's just the heat pump. It does that all the time. You have to get used to it."

We both expected that Nellie would now get down to brass tacks and attempt to read her crystal ball through superhuman extrasensory efforts and through persistent kneading and stroking with her psychic fingertips, but she did nothing of the kind.

"On Halloween I offer two-for-one specials. And there's always a 10% discount for seniors."

We sipped our tea and waited for Nellie to get started. But then the phone rang in the next room. Nellie went to answer the phone, while we exchanged puzzled glances. While Nellie talked on the phone, we examined our respective fortunes as told by the fortune cookies. Mine read: "When you leave, you will be a poorer man than when you arrived." Dr. Sanderson's read more simply: "Mother fucker!" We chuckled. Nellie probably wasn't aware that her rice cookies contained X-rated fortunes.

"Is 'motherfucke' one word or two?" asked Dr. Sanderson, but just then Nellie reappeared from the dark room and joined us again at the table. "That was him," she said.

"??"

"??"

"That was Mr. Dusty Ifsky," she explained.

"On the telephone?!" Dr. Sanderson asked skeptically.

"Yes, on the phone. Sometimes they call, sometimes they send a telegram or come in over the TV."

"??"

"??"

"Sonny, this is the twentieth century!... Sometimes they send a message with Federal Express or Airborne. It's just the collect calls that are irksome. At those distances!"

"Well, what did he say, Miss Belmo?" asked Dr. Sanderson, eager for the vital secret.

"Well, first he said hi, how are we doing. I said we're doing fine, only my arthritis has been acting up some." She poured us more tea. We drank it down in one gulp simultaneously.

"Well? Then what did he say?" Dr. Sanderson pressed her.

"He asked whether Mr. Lippewechsel has repaid me the \$12.50 he owes me."

"Who's Lippewechsel?" I asked.

"That's the neighbor. I said no, he hasn't. He said: 'Just like those Germans.' I said yes, I'm afraid so."

"Then what did he say, Miss Belmo?" I asked.

"Then he said good-bye and hung up."

"??"

“??”

“Well, didn’t he say anything about Marmeladov’s book?” Dr. Sanderson asked in disbelief.

“Oh, yes, he did.”

“...Well?”

“I can’t quite remember... Let’s see... No...”

“Miss Belmo, this is a question of life or death!”

“Ah, yes! He said this is a question of life or death. He said half of the book is correct and half of it is wrong.”

“Which half, Miss Belmo? Which half??”

“Well, every other chapter is correct. Alternate chapters.”

“Great!” exclaimed Dr. Sanderson, and he shook my hand euphorically.

I chimed in: “Miss Belmo, did he say which chapters? Odd or even?”

“Let’s see...” Nellie counted on her fingers, trying to recollect. “No...”

“Miss Belmo!” Dr. Sanderson implored.

“Yes! One, three, five and seven are correct. Yes. One, three, five and seven. It must be one, three, five and seven because I definitely remember one, three and seven.”

Dr. Sanderson planted a smackeroo on Nellie’s berouged old cheek. I laid three fifties on the table and a moment later we were burning rubber as we backed out of Nellie’s driveway and raced down the road. Twenty minutes later, we pulled out of the pizzeria with a large seven-topping pizza and two pitchers of beer to go. Overhead the dark spectres of clouds crept across the sky and summer lightning danced a dervish above the horizon as we sailed down the highway back to Hogtown.

## CHAPTER NINE: BALLS O' FIRE

The long, eventful day had quite fatigued E.T. After his seance with Ellie Belmo, he was now flying back to Hogtown with the same air courier. The lightning seemed uncomfortably close, but E.T. placed his fate in the daring pilot's hands and was about to doze off when a strange form in the distance to the right caught his attention. It twisted to and fro like a tiny, swirling cumulonimbus, but it was too angular to be a cloud. When lightning flashed, E.T. could make out a swirling silhouette. It resembled a rodeo rider on a bucking bronco. All grew dark again for a brief moment, but suddenly a whip cracked and lightning illuminated the turbid clouds as the sky seemed to explode with thunder. Then a shiver raced down E.T.'s spine, soft as it was, when his eyes met those of the rider. Such fiery, vindictive eyes E.T. had seen only in horrible nightmares -- and now those eyes had seen him! He knew it! He felt it! Somehow he sensed that he had been seen and now there was no escape! He sank lower in his seat, hoping against hope that the storm would pass, that the fire would not touch him. He knew inside that he was clean. He had done nothing wrong -- at least, nothing to deserve this! He was Winnie the Pooh. The fire was not intended for him. He closed his tiny eyes and laid his plump little hands over his goggles. But then he peeked between his fingers and -- Oh, God! -- the hellish rider was drawing near, fiercely whipping his three foaming steeds as chariot and rider bounded across the surreal, seething cobblestones of clouds.

Drawing alongside the airplane, the rider bared his white teeth framed in drooping mustache and long, scraggly beard. His flaming hair flew in the wind as he flung a glowing lightning bolt straight at the plane's landing gear. The hot, searing zigzag perforated the tire and hung there for a brief moment before the melting rubber fell from the wheel. Then Elijah threw a second lightning spear at the other wheel and blew it to smithereens.

Feeling the jolts, the pilot looked back and saw the sky pirate galloping alongside his plane. He hit full throttle and opened his snuffbox, preparing for a long duel. Elijah fell behind, but made a superhuman effort in flinging a well-aimed zinger that seared away the left half of the tail wing. E.T.'s teeth chattered as the whole plane vibrated from the impact and he could hear the zinger zing as it zipped past his left ear. He desperately wanted to sink lower into his seat, but he was already as low as he could get. The plane began to shudder. E.T. clung tight to the fuselage as the tail section began to shift violently from side to side. Suddenly his fingers began to burn as the whole fuselage lit up from the terrible charioteer's lightning prong. The pilot careened the plane to the left and they dived hundreds of feet into the dark clouds below. All was now quiet except for the heavy turbulence, but then E.T. felt another humdinger strike the rear of the plane. The wing trusses lit up like lightbulb filaments and hummed like bowstrings.

The pilot spat and lifted the plane into a spiralling loop, but the fearless rider was not in the least confused by this old trick. His deafening laughter rumbled across the sky as he continued to pommel the airplane with lightning bolts from all sides. The plane shuddered and began to lose altitude, careening to the right. The pilot struggled to roll the plane to the left and seemed to be about to succeed when suddenly fate guided one little lightning arrow straight into the spinning propeller. Sparks flew in all directions as E.T. felt the plane slip into a steep nosedive. The fiery chariot descended alongside them. The evil rider bared his teeth and laughed his deafening laugh as his hair streamed like a conflagration. His gleaming eyes met E.T.'s for a brief instant before one of the stallions grazed the lower wing with his hoof, sending the plane into a fatal roll. The charioteer fell behind, lingering beneath the clouds and splitting the sky with hellish laughter.

The pilot struggled to extricate himself in time to bail out, but a 700,000-volt dart struck him in the back, pinning him to the instrument panel. The ground was approaching E.T. with supernatural speed. He fought to free himself from his shoulder straps, but it was too late!...

Then he woke up -- just as the pilot touched down in Hogtown, bouncing the biplane only two or three times before coming to a rather abrupt stop in one of the more effective potholes on the airstrip. Although his hemorrhoids were killing him, E.T. experienced a relief that can only be compared with what Lazarus must have felt when he awoke from death and once again sensed firm, gritty ground beneath his bare feet. A faithful devotee of established aviation tradition, he applauded the pilot for his successful touchdown and patiently waited for assistance in climbing down.

It was past midnight. We had been waiting at the airstrip for nearly an hour when E.T.'s plane finally arrived. E.T. and Dr. Sanderson spoke as I drove them home:

"Well, what did Ellie tell you?"

"Well, first you tell me what Nellie told you."

"Well... No, you go first."

E.T. gave in: "Well, Ellie said the book's half correct."

I couldn't believe my ears.

"You're kidding... That's what Nellie said, too!" exclaimed Dr. Sanderson.

E.T.'s face lit up like a schoolkid's. "Well, I'll be batshit crazy if..."

"Wait a minute," Dr. Sanderson interrupted. "Half correct?"

"That's right. Alternate chapters."

I couldn't believe my ears.

"Goddamn!" Dr. Sanderson exclaimed.

We all laughed. We were jubilant. E.T. and Dr. Sanderson clinked paper cups of beer. There was talk of a new school of literary criticism. It would find more converts than even Deconstruction, Reconstruction and the Between-the-Legs School of Literary Criticism which so recently had swept the nation.

But then Dr. Sanderson suddenly sobered. "Wait a minute!" he said. "You don't suppose they somehow got in touch, do you?"

E.T. pondered a moment before asking, "How could they?"

“Like over the phone?... Hey, did Ellie call anybody on the phone while you were there?”

“No, she has no phone. In fact, she doesn’t have any electricity. No TV, no radio. Nothing. There aren’t even any wires going to her house. She says she doesn’t believe in wires. She’s living in another dimension...”

“Maybe a pay phone? What time did you arrive?”

“At 9:13, like we agreed.”

“So did we,” Dr. Sanderson said. “When did you leave?”

“At 10:05. She had me try her preserves.”

“That’s after we left. So there’s no way they could have rigged it.”

“It’s official, then,” pronounced E.T. as he got out of the car.

I flicked the headlights on bright as he groped around for the door of his house. Then Dr. Sanderson and I headed for home on our bikes. As I coasted down the road, the thought entered my mind that Ellie and Nellie might have rigged the results by *telepathy*. But this seemed farfetched.

## CHAPTER TEN: PUBLISH OR PERISH!

The final meeting on Marmeladov's tenure began the next morning at 11:00 in the seminar room. E.T. and Dr. Sanderson both arrived late, following the dictates of their respective genetic codes. Hörnerträger checked his watch as the two slaggards entered the room and took the only available seats at opposite ends of the table.

"Once again, I must remind you," Hörnerträger began, surveying the vast theater of war that unfolded before him, "that everything that is said at these meetings is strictly confidential. Nothing that we say here is to be revealed to anyone, including the candidate for tenure."

"That's right," Tphutti chimed in. "We can say anything we want here. Nobody can touch us."

"That's what academic freedom's all about," Sully agreed.

"Well, I've already told you what I have to say," Helweena grumbled. "The constant obscenities, the rape jokes... It's been going on too long."

Dr. Sanderson raised his eyebrows. "Rape jokes?" he asked.

"Yes, the female students have complained about it for years," replied Helweena.

"And you never said anything to Yuri Ilyich?" E.T. inquired. "You just saved it for this meeting?"

"What could I say? Besides, I just hoped it wasn't true."

"And you're convinced it's true?" asked Dr. Sanderson.

"Well, yesterday's reports confirmed that, didn't they?" Helweena replied.

"Yuri Ilyich says there were no obscenities except one word for the benefit of those who chose not to plug their ears," E.T. argued.

An unpleasant silence set in as all recollected the accusations of the previous day.

"Hey, wait a minute!" Dr. Sanderson had a new idea. "Why do those guys over in the English Department get to

assign stories and novels with all kinds of obscenities in them?”

“That’s different, Hans,” replied Ten Gallon. “That’s to protect freedom of expression. It’s art.”

“Well, let me play Devil’s advocate, then. Let’s say Yuri Ilyich actually did mention a dirty or vulgar word in his class. Are you saying that if I write a one-page story chock-full of the raunchiest obscenities you’ve ever heard -- it’s okay to read and discuss that story in class, whereas if I mention the word ‘shit’ in one of my lessons, then I’m to be thrown out of the college?”

“That’s right,” Stableboy replied.

“Well,” Canin interjected, “‘shit’ isn’t really an obscenity. It’s just a vulgarity.”

“Okay,” Sanderson replied, “let’s take a raunchy one -- ‘cocksucker.’ If I say ‘cocksucker,’ can they throw me out of the college, but it’s okay if I read and discuss a raunchy story about cocksuckers?”

“Well, that depends,” Ten Gallon corrected him. “It depends on whether the one-page story is yours or someone else’s.”

“You mean, some people have freedom of expression and others don’t?”

Ten Gallon was cornered. “Well, sometimes, yes,” he chuckled.

“It depends on whether you’re an established writer,” Frau Frau added.

“And whether you actually discuss the obscenities out loud in class, as opposed to simply assigning the obscene material for the students to read,” Helweena commented.

But Stableboy corrected her: “No, Helweena, you can discuss the obscenities if you weren’t the author of the story.”

Even Ikota joined the discussion: “Uh, actually, I think you can discuss them even if you’re the author. It depends on your intentions. If you’re deliberately doing it to offend people, then it’s not okay.”

“How in God’s name can we be sure of someone’s intentions??” asked E.T.

“Hmmm...” Ten Gallon ruminated.

There was a momentary pause until Tphutti resumed the debate: "...Well, returning to Hans' statement that some have freedom of expression and others don't -- I'd reply that you have freedom of expression, but you have to stay within the bounds that are established by the college for the protection of the public."

"In other words," E.T. countered, "Hans has freedom of expression as long as he expresses himself in the way that the college tells him?"

"???"

"???"

"???"

"?????"

"?!?"

"??"

"?!?"

Helweena broke the silence: "Well, doesn't it have to do with an author's characters? I mean, if they use obscenities, but the author doesn't necessarily subscribe to that kind of language..."

Dr. Sanderson was quick to reply: "You mean, fictitious people have freedom of expression, but real people don't? Sounds like a pretty fictitious freedom to me. Any way you look at it, it's a double standard. One standard for artists, and another for those who teach art. And what if we write *and* teach literature?... Aren't we artists, too, after all, at least a little bit, when we cook up ways to explain the ways language works?..."

"!!"

"!..."

"!?"

"??"

"?!?"

"!!!?..."

"Well, foreign languages are not exactly an art form," Stableboy replied.

E.T., bolstered by Dr. Sanderson's strong stand, parried Stableboy's argument: "But foreign languages are a form of

expression. Why should only so-called 'artists' enjoy freedom to express themselves as they please?"

"At any rate," said Stableboy, "most of us simply don't have this problem. Marmeladov had to do something to bring the problem on."

"That's right," Frau Frau added. "He somehow invited trouble."

"I think it's okay to mention a vulgar word if you warn the class there's one coming and ask if anyone objects," Nutti speculated.

"No," Frau Frau responded, "this is no good, either, because some people will feel pressured by their peers to go along with an obscenity even though they really object."

"How about farting?" Dr. Sanderson ironized. "Is it okay to 'let one' in class?"

"That depends on whether you do it intentionally or by accident," Stableboy replied, failing to detect the irony in Dr. Sanderson's question.

Sanderson noticed that E.T.'s face seemed extremely concentrated, as though he were preparing an airtight argument that would refute everything that had been said.

"Well, any way you look at it," Hörnerträger resumed, "this is not the proper topic for today's meeting. These questions regarding Marmeladov's teaching were answered yesterday. The only thing that I would like to add is that none of you are to go around me or the department in conducting your own private investigations." He peered sternly at E.T.

Suddenly E.T. farted -- a low, lumbering troll that seemed to drone: "Flabbergassed..." followed by two ethereal fairies that taunted: "Pipsqueak!" Helweena grimaced, while most of the assembled colleagues pretended not to notice.

Hörnerträger continued: "Today our task is to evaluate Marmeladov's research."

E.T. and Dr. Sanderson exchanged conspiratorial glances.

"Well," Dr. Stableboy began, "I must say that, like Helmut, I have serious problems with Yuri Ilyich's inflated opinion of his own research."

"So do I," Frau Frau agreed.

“I’m afraid I have to agree,” Dr. Nutti joined in. “The man needs to learn a little humility!”

Ten Gallon pursed his lips and tucked in his double chin pompously as a gesture of concurrence with the opinions of his fellow scholars.

Dr. Sanderson decided to come to Marmeladov’s defense. “Wait a minute,” he objected. “What if he did once say that he thinks he’s onto the biggest discovery in the history of Dostoevsky studies? I remember: ten years ago, when I started working on my first book, I thought I had something important. Only later...”

“*First book?*” Hörnerträger interrupted him.

“Have you finished it?” Helweena teased him cheerfully.

“Well, I’ve switched to another project.” This time, Dr. Sanderson’s singlehanded foray onto the battlefield was a miserable failure.

E.T. attempted to rescue him with some friendly cross-fire. “When I wrote my dissertation, I thought my ideas were God’s greatest gift to man. Later I disowned them.”

Ten Gallon grinned through his broken front teeth and inquired: “E.T., are you defending Marmeladov or attacking him?”

There was a brief silence as everyone tried to sort out the logic of what had been said.

“The point is,” Tphutti resumed, “one should always maintain a professional demeanor. It’s exceedingly unprofessional of Yuri Ilyich to run around bandying such immodest claims. This is the Magic Kingdom, after all.”

Hörnerträger continued the attack. “Yes, it seems that there is general agreement on this point. I am making some notations: *unprofessional, immodest claims.*” After neatly dotting all three i’s, he asked for further comments. E.T. and Dr. Sanderson hesitated to speak, exchanging nervous glances. No comments on Marmeladov’s research were forthcoming from any of the colleagues, who now gazed at their dark reflections in the glass tabletop.

“In that case, I propose that we evaluate the outside evaluations of Marmeladov’s research.” Hörnerträger reached for a

small stack of letters and faxes that lay before him in Yuri Ilyich's file. "We have now received all the outside reviews. By now, I trust that you have all had time to examine these letters. Tphutti and I have gone through them with a fine-tooth comb. We found that six are positive, while three are quite negative on the whole."

"Yes, and those three include the most prominent scholars," Helweena added. "Pierre Canin is known at every university press in the country. He has serious reservations about Marmeladov's scholarship. And everyone has heard of Gregory Friedbender. He states that there is no Elijah the Prophet in Dostoevsky -- that it's a figment of Marmeladov's imagination, that Marmeladov distorts facts and shows no respect for previous studies."

"I must say that I also have serious reservations," Frau Frau agreed. "I hear he drinks an awful lot."

"Pierre Canin has only read a few short papers by Marmeladov at best," E.T. protested. "He can't read Russian, so surely he hasn't read the manuscript on Dostoevsky."

"Have you read the manuscript, E.T.?" Hörnerträger asked with an inquisitorial gleam in his eyes.

E.T.'s face and bald head turned a deeper shade of pink. He lowered his eyes and fingered his plastic prayer beads beneath the table.

Stableboy redoubled the offensive: "E.T., you've also got to remember that we're not simply evaluating Marmeladov's research in and of itself. We're also evaluating his success in promoting the Magic Kingdom, in enhancing its reputation as a major research center, as a think-tank that will someday become the flagship of the South. If he hasn't managed to get a single book into print, then he's failed as a salesman for our college. Note that even some of those who wrote positive evaluations of Marmeladov's work had not heard of him before. He's failed to sell himself and he's failed to sell the college."

"The college is up for sale?" Dr. Sanderson ironized. "Who's buying it?"

"The students," Tphutti retorted.

"Their parents, the taxpayers..." Stableboy added.

“Alfonzo is absolutely right,” Hörnerträger argued. “Ultimately it is publishing that counts -- not just writing for writing’s sake. This is why my policy has always been to read none of my colleagues’ work until it has been published.”

“But Yuri Ilyich has a good number of articles,” E.T. pleaded.

“E.T., why do you call his papers ‘articles’ when they’ve never been published? Besides, he has nothing of major proportions in print, don’t you see?” Stableboy retorted, beginning to lose patience. “Not even a measly little sixty-page monograph. In the old days you could get away with just a few articles, but nowadays you’re expected to have at least one book to receive tenure.”

Dr. Sanderson suddenly had an idea that seemed to dawn upon him for the first time. “Wait!” he said. “Who’s to say there’s not more genius in a seven-page article than in a fat volume of 500 pages?”

“That’s a cynical thing to say,” replied Nutti, whose 501-page *Life and Works* had only recently made its glitzy debut in the college bookstore on the shelf for faculty publications.

“Don’t be an anarchist, Hans,” Frau Frau added.

Ten Gallon decided to clarify the issue: “It’s generally assumed in scholarly circles, at least for purposes of evaluation, that genius is evenly distributed throughout the pages of one’s *oeuvre* and, for that matter, throughout the pages of one’s given profession. Hence, the emphasis on quantity.”

A momentary, barely perceptible fog seemed to descend upon the faces of the colleagues as they pondered the inner depths of Ten Gallon’s sententious soliloquy, but the fog lifted straightaway, warmed by the bright rays of the chairman’s gentle words:

“It’s publish or perish, E.T. Like it or not, this is a fact of academia. Marmeladov has not published -- he must perish!” Hörnerträger struck the table with his fist to drive home his point. Unfortunately, he drove the point a little too far and managed to crack the glass on the table’s edge. The glass whined in protest.

All eyes focussed on the cracked glass as E.T. tried another line of argumentation: "We should bear in mind that Yuri Ilyich has done some creative writing..."

"Creative writing doesn't count," Stableboy objected.

"No, it counts, but it has to be published," Ten Gallon corrected him. "What's he published?"

"Nothing but an erotic poem in the *Hogtown Gazette*," Helweena replied.

"An erotic poem?" asked Frau Frau.

"Yes, in the Sunday paper," explained Helweena. "It's an embarrassment to the college and to the department."

All hung their heads and reflected, gazing into the glass tabletop. Finally Dr. Sanderson broke the silence:

"Well, let's suppose Yuri Ilyich has done some offensive things. But let's also suppose -- just for argument's sake, okay? -- let's just suppose that Yuri Ilyich has actually made a big find in Russian literature like he says."

"Come on, Hans..." Helweena wanted to interrupt.

"Helweena! Let the man have his say," Hörnerträger interceded. "This is a democratic process, after all."

Dr. Sanderson continued: "If we assume both these things to be true -- well, isn't it pretty common for discoverers, pioneers, originators to be rebels of sorts? Isn't it a common personality flaw with them that they manage to offend people? Doesn't that same talent for exploring, for tearing down the old and innovating the new -- doesn't that same aggressive drive to reshape and revolutionize often make them rather offensive people?"

"Well, Karl Marx was a revolutionary and he kept a mistress under the same roof with his wife," commented Professor Nutti. "That's pretty offensive, I'd say!"

"Charles Darwin offended a lot of people," Ikota added.

"So did Elvis Presley!" Ten Gallon chimed in.

"That's just my point," Dr. Sanderson argued. "It just seems like the college will have to choose whether it wants innovators or smooth advertisers who never do much of anything original."

An awkward silence set in as all gazed at the dark faces in the glass tabletop and reflected over Dr. Sanderson's idea.

“Wait a minute, Hans,” Dr. Canin objected. “Are you trying to imply that we’re just a bunch of unoriginal public relations people?”

Dr. Sanderson was confronted head-on with the inevitability of Canin’s logic. He had not foreseen this treacherous twist to his simple argument. He searched his brain for a quick way out of the logical trap, but his mental search only kept leading him back to the bar where he and E.T. had encountered Woland’s assistants. Finally, all he managed to say was: “No, Jean Jacques, I wasn’t trying to imply that...”

The colleagues eyed Dr. Sanderson silently and suspiciously. After a few moments, Stableboy spoke up. “I suggest we vote and get this bloody business over with.”

Hörnerträger seemed about to give his usual summation. E.T. and Dr. Sanderson exchanged knowing glances. Clearly it was time to bring out the big cannon.

“Listen, everybody,” E.T. began. “I don’t exactly know how to tell you this, but... the Devil is among us...”

“E.T.! Come on!” Ten Gallon scoffed.

“No, I’m dead serious! The Devil is here among us. Coldburn’s getting zapped by lightning was no accident. Woland’s strange variety show act at the prayer service... It’s all the machinations of the Devil. What you’re doing to Marmeladov is a mortal sin. The Devil will punish us...”

Helweena smirked cynically. Others scoffed and cleared their throats.

“Look,” E.T. continued, “you may not believe in the Devil. Few people do nowadays. Or they believe the Devil comes only in the afterlife or in other places. But the fact is...”

Dr. Sanderson interjected his own comments to reinforce E.T.’s arguments: “I was skeptical like all of you,” he said. “But then yesterday I was convinced. There’s no doubt about it. We were in touch with another dimension. The fifth dimension, if you will.”

“You mean, it’s the dawning of the Age of Aquarius?” Frau Frau joked.

“When Jupiter aligns with Mars?” Helweena scoffed.

All the faculty laughed. E.T. and Dr. Sanderson remained stoically grave.

“No, seriously,” Dr. Sanderson pleaded.

“I flew all the way to Jupiter...” E.T. continued.

“We consulted two clairvoyants,” Dr. Sanderson explained. “Separately. There was no possibility that they could have been in communication with each other.”

“That’s right,” continued E.T. “And both gave identical psychic readings on Yuri Ilyich’s theory about Dostoevsky.”

“That’s right,” Dr. Sanderson added. “It so happens that the book is half right.”

“Yes,” E.T. confirmed. “Alternate chapters are right. Every other one.”

E.T. and Dr. Sanderson peered at their colleagues, waiting to hear the echo from the shot heard round the world. But no big boom was to be heard. All sat with folded arms or slouched in their chairs, armed to the teeth with that mass-produced, impenetrable skepticism which only the advanced technology of the twentieth century can manufacture.

“Two clairvoyants in independent seances,” Dr. Sanderson emphasized.

The silence continued, lurking in the air like the odor of urine and faeces in the straightjacket ward of an insane asylum. It was an angry, disgusted, nauseous silence -- the nasty silence of a scandal. Somebody had overstepped the rational and universally recognized bounds of decency. E.T. and Dr. Sanderson sensed that victory was within their grasp. Soon the echo would resound and the enemy would emerge from the shadows, waving white hankies with tiny splotches of rosy blood.

Finally Hörnerträger recovered his presence of mind. “So the book is half wrong?”

“Half right,” E.T. corrected him.

“Then it’s half wrong, right?” Hörnerträger countered.

“Well, even if it is half wrong, it’s half right -- and that’s an accomplishment,” E.T. argued.

“You mean half an accomplishment?” Stableboy quipped.

“May I ask which chapters are correct? Even or odd?” Hörnerträger inquired.

“Even,” E.T. replied. And at the same time Dr. Sanderson said, “Odd.”

Both were thunderstruck. Dr. Sanderson felt his face grow pale. E.T.’s ears burned. They stared at each other in sickened bewilderment, wondering how they could have overlooked such an important detail. Neither of them noticed the smirks and snickers of their colleagues.

Hörnerträger, triumphant, began his summation, according to his custom: “Yesterday the Department of Modern Languages concluded almost unanimously that in the area of teaching Dr. Marmeladov lacks the professionalism that is vital if one is to flourish in a changing institution such as ours. Today we have reviewed another aspect of Dr. Marmeladov’s scholarly profile -- his research and publications. There is a consensus of opinion among the colleagues that Dr. Marmeladov’s research is seriously flawed by the lack of substantial, sizeable publications coming off the presses of any reputable publishing houses. I have also noted a clear consensus regarding Dr. Marmeladov’s excessive *hubris* -- that tragic flaw which brought to ruin so many of the classical heroes -- and I certainly do not mean to imply that Dr. Marmeladov is a classic hero.

“Thus, there appears to be a consensus that Dr. Marmeladov has not been equal to the high standards of the Magic Kingdom. But this is only my assessment of the situation as I shall report it to the dean. It still remains for us to take a final, deciding vote on the question of Dr. Marmeladov’s tenure. The voice of the people is the voice of God, as the old saying goes. Please register your vote on one of these slips of paper.”

As the chairman began to pass out the ballots, Zoya Shortcut opened the door just wide enough to insert her smiling face into the seminar room. She waved a sheet of paper and reported to Hörnerträger that one more outside review had just arrived by fax.

Hörnerträger hastily snatched the fax from Zoya’s hand, perusing it with furrowed brow as he sat back down. The col-

leagues' attention was riveted on the face of the chairman as he skimmed through the newly arrived fax and vocalized a few random passages: "It is with great pleasure... hmmm... take the liberty... hmmm... punishment..." etc. etc. Finally he raised his eyes and met the expectant faces of his fellow academicians.

"This is some sort of prank," he growled, glancing suspiciously at E.T. "At any rate, it is an unsolicited evaluation and it cannot be admitted for consideration."

"Oh, come on," Helweena coaxed, reaching to snatch the fax from his hands. "It can't be all that significant."

"Yes," agreed Frau Frau. "Let us see it."

Hörnerträger refused to surrender the fax to his better half and neatly placed it beneath his notebook. "No," he said, "the rules will not allow it. We must vote, unprejudiced by outside influences."

"Then can we see it after the vote?" Stableboy asked cheerily.

Hörnerträger hesitated. Then other voices chimed in: "Yes. How about after the vote? There should be no harm in that."

After a long pause, Hörnerträger replied reluctantly, "Alright, those who want to see the fax may take a look after the vote."

Each colleague quickly marked a ballot. The votes were counted, recounted -- and then recounted once again just in case any ballots had changed of their own will after the second count. The final tally was six against tenure and two for tenure. There was one abstention.

E.T. had lost the battle. He and Dr. Sanderson sat motionless and speechless as their fellow scholars crowded around the curious fax.

Helweena read aloud:

*"It is with great pleasure that I write this evaluation of the work done by Professor Yuri Ilyich Marmeladov. I take the liberty of sending this unsolicited letter in the hope that my comments will be received in their true light -- that is, simply as the thoughtful observations of the writer to whom Professor*

*Marmeladov has devoted so much of his life and work. My letter is an 'outside' evaluation in the truest sense of the word, but it is written by an 'insider' of sorts -- and so, I ask for your forbearance. First, I should state that I have on occasion peered over Yuri Ilyich's shoulder as he worked on his book, so I am quite familiar with the manuscript, which, as you know, is written in my native tongue. When Yuri Ilyich first began to decipher the many allusions to Elijah in Crime and Punishment and Stepanchikovo, I must confess that I greeted his revelations with mixed emotions. I stood by helplessly as my characters were coolly stripped to their undergarments before the cold, indifferent public eye. But the ancient lore surrounding Elijah has slipped into obscurity in these godless, Soviet times, and it warms the soul to see mankind's spirituality illuminated anew, much as a beautiful and ancient icon is carefully raised from the dust and darkness of a forgotten cellar up into the light of day. The concept of sin has gone out of fashion and the cosmic dilemma of God's imperfect universe is of little interest in an era preoccupied with oiling the wheels of the conveyor line or incubating a microchip that will live forever.*

*Although readers have always puzzled over and struggled with the spiritual themes of my works, I cannot say that I have felt particularly dismayed by this as the present century races on. After all, a writer's desire to convey an urgent and clearly formulated idea is counterbalanced by an urge to challenge, to mystify, to puzzle, to clothe the ephemeral and eternal in the garb of the real.*

*I wholeheartedly support Yuri Ilyich's endeavours not so much because he has sometimes succeeded -- but because his work is an unrelenting labor of love that will continue even after you have spat upon him and divided his rags. It will bear fruit and outlive all of you and your tower. I stand beside him - - and beside all who, like Yuri Ilyich, strive to transcend the bounds of time, space, knowledge and self. I pray for the day when He descends to judge the living and the dead. I shall*

*open my arms to Yuri Ilyich and all his brethren. Together we shall walk the twisting, moonlight path to the New Jerusalem -- if not to Light, then at least to Peace.*

*Sincerely,*

*[signed:] Fyodor Dostoevsky*

As Helweena began to read, her scholar-allies snickered and scoffed after every line. She quickened her pace as she proceeded, slurring the ends of sentences and reading in an ever more bored and flippant tone. By the end of the letter, her colleagues' faces had sobered and assumed an air of troubled reflection or puzzlement. From the very start, Hörnerträger glanced furtively at E.T. and Dr. Sanderson, obviously suspecting that these malcontents had concocted the odd letter and arranged for it to arrive during the meeting. Yet, their faces betrayed genuine surprise and quiet curiosity as they listened to the message being read. Hörnerträger was nonplussed.

An awkward pause followed the reading. There were grins, frowns, giggles, shrugging of shoulders and shaking of heads, but there were no words. Hörnerträger's suspicions began to extend to the other colleagues, who might have written the letter as a spoof on E.T.'s escapade into other-worldly realms, but how could they have known in advance? He rejected this hypothesis. Finally he asked sharply, "Who is responsible for this?"

"This is preposterous!" Frau Frau exclaimed indignantly.

"A clever prank," Stableboy commented.

"Maybe Yuri Ilyich sent it," Nutti speculated cheerfully.

"What phone number was it sent from?" asked Hörnerträger.

"7000," Helweena replied.

"Just 7000?"

"Just 7000."

"There's no such number, is there?"

All faces were blank.

"What's the area code?"

"There is no area code."

"?? ??"

“It’s from the ‘7000 Club’,” Ten Gallon quipped.

“Shouldn’t this letter go into Yuri Ilyich’s file?” Dr. Sanderson inquired.

“No, this is out of the question. Unsolicited letters are completely extraneous. Our business is complete. I must now draft my letter to the dean reporting our decision.” He crunched the fax in his small fist.

The scholars filed out of the seminar room, joking and chuckling. E.T. and Dr. Sanderson remained standing at opposite ends of the table, divided and conquered. E.T. fingered his prayer beads and had an overwhelming urge to wash his sweaty hands. The crumpled letter from the Master stirred slightly on the shiny glass tabletop.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN: HOW PROFESSOR IKOTA VOTED

As the time to vote drew near, Professor Ikota grew uneasy. He was not the sort that likes conflict and confrontations. Personally, he could not make heads or tails of the matter. Yuri Ilyich had always been decent enough as far as he could tell. But it was apparent that Stableboy and others were firmly in the camp of Chairman Hörnerträger and Helweena. Had he missed something?... It was a stressful situation. On the one hand there was Yuri Ilyich: why not vote for him? But on the other hand, Hörnerträger was dead-set against him. He felt himself backsliding again. What if Hörnerträger figured out how he had voted? What then?... But Marmeladov was a human being, after all. Maybe he really should vote for him anyway?... He began to perspire and he wished that he had not eaten that second bowl of raisin bran for breakfast. His innards were churning like a wine press. Incontinence again. He squirmed in his chair and squinted at his own reflection in the shiny tabletop. Finally it grew unbearable. He quietly excused himself and headed for the men's room.

The restrooms in Grimm Hall had recently been equipped with all the newest technology. The lights switched on automatically as Ikota entered. He rushed to the nearest stall and set about his business. Strange. Sudden constipation after being wracked by rampant diarrhea. He scanned the latest graffiti as he strained to unload his burden. But somehow it wouldn't come. He turned from the graffiti and focussed all his efforts on his mission as bombardier. He strained until he felt the veins swelling on his neck and forehead. At such moments Professor Ikota is always haunted by thoughts of voyeurs and hidden cameras. He looked up at the ceiling. For some reason he thought of a kamikazi.

Suddenly it came, but not just as Ikota had expected. There was a clinking sound as though tiny crystal bric-a-brac had fallen to the marble floor of a zoological museum. He slumped forward, feeling great relief, but at the same time he felt himself carried away on an antediluvian wave of stark,

raving panic. Instinctively he knew that something was amiss. He looked down and -- sure enough -- amid the murky water assorted vertebrae resembling flute keys were resting there on the porcelain bottom. His own spine! He slumped helplessly to his knees beside the toilet bowl and reached down into the water to salvage his missing parts. Surely there was a way to put them back together! After all, they sew fingers and arms back on, don't they? Even scalps and penises. There must be a way to put a spine back in. But just as he reached into the nasty water, the automatic flush device clicked on and the little vertebrae were swept away, clinking and tinkling as they slipped down the pipes.

Professor Ikota hugged the toilet to maintain his balance. He hesitated, debating whether to call out for help, but decided... well, he decided it was all too bizarre and embarrassing to yell for help. Struggling, crawled over to the sink, where he managed to pull himself up and wash the stench from his hands and arms. Now he had to figure out how to make it back to the meeting. Before making two steps to the door, he collapsed to the floor again. Writhing and grunting, he rolled out into the hallway, where he finally had the good sense to remove his belt and improvise a noose which he then hooked onto door hinges and lamps for support as he lunged along. When he reached his own office, he was struck by a sudden inspiration. He unfolded his trusty pointer and tied it to his back with his belt as a splint beneath his suit jacket. Now he could stand fairly comfortably and walk slowly with only a slight stoop. In this way he managed to return to the meeting in time for the final vote.

Dr. Sully handed him a ballot just as he sat down. Needless to say, Professor Ikota now saw everything in a new light. Who was Marmeladov to him? What were Marmeladov's problems in comparison with his own? Who was it who really needed support? Him or Marmeladov? Professor Ikota wrote "Abstain" without any hesitation. Then he folded his ballot and passed it on to Hörnerträger.

After the meeting, Professor Ikota went straight to his car and, adjusting his pointer once again to allow him to sit down, he headed for his chiropractor's. But as he turned out into

College Boulevard, it suddenly dawned on him that the chiropractor would have nothing to work with. He made a U-turn and headed for the hospital emergency room.

In the emergency room he took a number from the automatic dispenser and sat down, waiting for his number to be called. Finally he realized that the numbers were simply a clever way of separating the casually ill from the true emergencies. He carefully rose from his seat, adjusting the pointer once again, and approached a young intern who seemed to have some authority:

“Sir, excuse me, but I seem to have lost my spine.”

“Spine, eh?”

“That’s right. My spine. My backbone.”

“Have you seen a therapist?”

“Well, I thought of going to a chiropractor...”

“No, I mean... you know, a shrink.”

“A psychiatrist?”

“Yeah. I mean, you say you’ve lost your spine...”

“No, seriously. Take a look, will you? This morning I had two bowls of raisin bran for breakfast and then, well, I had one hell of a bowel movement.”

“I’m real happy about your bowel movement, but what happened to your spine?” The intern grinned.

“Well, I have this pointer now.” Professor Ikota struggled to bare the lower end of the pointer.

“A hip pointer, eh?”

“No, no. A pointer, see?”

“That antenna? That’s a pointer, eh?”

“That’s how I stay upright now. No spine.” He pointed to his back.

“Well, where in the world did you lose your spine?”

Professor Ikota cupped one hand over his mouth as he confided: “Down the toilet.”

The intern gave a gleeful laugh. “Down the toilet, eh?” he chuckled. “Take a seat here and, no matter what, don’t have any bowel movements!” Still smirking, he turned to a nurse and disappeared through swinging doors.

A half hour later, Professor Ikota was sitting in the office of a therapist, Dr. Derrida. The therapist wore a green jacket,

white slacks and New Balance running shoes. He began in a calm, fatherly voice as he examined Ikota's chart:

"I'm Dr. Derrida. But you can call me Jack. I see you're a doctor, too?"

"Well, in a manner of speaking... Doctor of Philosophy..."

"Not a back doctor," Derrida joked.

"No, not a back doctor."

"You must treat people's philosophies? What's the successful cure rate on philosophies nowadays?..." Dr. Derrida ceased joking and assumed a more serious demeanor. "So you say you've lost your spine?"

"That's right. Only about an hour ago. It's been a stressful day. We had to vote. And I had two bowls of raisin bran for breakfast..."

"Do you have a drinking problem?"

"No, today I've had only a few cups of coffee. Sometimes I can't sleep, but... no, no drinking problem."

"Do you take any medications? No drugs?"

„No, no drugs."

"Have you ever experienced this problem before?"

Professor Ikota was taken aback by this question. "Doctor," he pleaded, "we have only one spine. You can only lose your spine once, I assume."

"That's true. You've got a good point there. I thought perhaps you had lost a few vertebrae before."

"Yeah, like a few here and a few there?" Professor Ikota feigned a smile. The therapist smiled, too. Then suddenly the professor snapped: "Doctor, my spine went tinkling down the toilet! I need medical attention! Who can help me here?"

"I'm sorry, Professor, I thought that was a joke... the part about... you know, a few here and a few there. So you've never had this problem before? No back problems?"

"I've had back strain and I've seen a chiropractor. You know, to ease the pain. But nothing like this."

"Have you been feeling overworked lately?"

"Not really. Only today was pretty stressful. I mean, even before I lost my spine we were voting in our department..."

“I see. Professor Ikota, has it occurred to you that the loss of your spine might simply be an hallucination induced by the burdens of your professional responsibilities or by a hostile work environment?”

“I wish to God it were an hallucination, but, Doctor, my hands were up to the elbows in that diarrhea and I swear that was no hallucination! Here, smell my hands. Go ahead, smell ‘em! They still reek. That’s no hallucination.”

After sniffing the professor’s hands, the doctor seemed halfway convinced. “Alright,” he said, “let’s take a look at your spine.” The doctor felt the length of Professor Ikota’s back. “Seems to be off center.”

“That’s my pointer. I’m using it to prop myself up. Otherwise I can’t stand up.”

The doctor reached beneath Ikota’s suit jacket and ran his fingers up and down his back. He remained silent, continuing to search for the missing spine.

“What’s it feel like, Doctor? My ‘hallucination’, that is. What does my ‘hallucination’ feel like now?”

Ten minutes later, Professor Ikota propped his torso up on his pointer as he sat in the office of Dr. Foramen, the head orthopedist. Dr. Foramen pointed to poster-size wall illustrations as he spoke in a matter-of-fact tone:

“...so here you see the nerves as they leave the spinal cord to supply the muscles of the trunk and limbs and connect with the nerves of the sympathetic nervous system, which arise by a short motor ventral root and a short sensory dorsal root, and of which there are thirty-one pairs in man classified according to the part of the spinal cord from which they arise into eight cervical pairs, twelve thoracic pairs, five lumbar pairs, five sacral pairs and one coccygeal pair. Now if we turn to the spinal column here... Excuse me, Professor Ikota, is that a pointer you’re holding?” Before Ikota could reply, Dr. Foramen had stripped him of his primary support so that he slumped down in his chair. Dr. Foramen continued, using the pointer with great dexterity: “The vertebral column is the chief supporting structure of the body of all vertebrates, including man. It is comprised of this series of cartilaginous cylinders

called vertebrae, which are held together by fibrous bands of connective tissue. There are normally thirty-three bony vertebrae, occasionally thirty-four -- uh, in your case, Professor Ikota, there might have been fewer. We may never know. There are seven vertebrae here in the cervical region. The first two of these, called the *axis* and the *atlas*, support the cranium and allow the head to move. The thoracic region has twelve vertebrae, each of which is attached to a pair of ribs. Below the chest there are five lumbar vertebrae and five sacral vertebrae, which are fused into a single bone called the *sacrum*. Four coccygeal vertebrae end the spinal column. They are also fused into a single bone called the *coccyx*. The curvature of the spine is most clearly visible from a lateral view. At about three or four months after birth, as the child begins to raise his head, a cervical curve develops, convex ventrally, and at about nine months, as the child begins to sit up freely, a lumbar convex curve appears. This alternating curvature of the spinal column provides flexibility, allowing the spine to bend and twist, and helps reduce jarring that may occur as a result of strenuous movement. Abnormalities of the curvature of the spine include congenital or acquired *scoliosis* -- when the spine curves from side to side. An abnormal outward curve in the thoracic region of the spine known as *kyphosis* is often due to tuberculosis of the bone. There is also abnormal inward curvature, known as *lordosis*."

"But, Doctor Foramen, I have no spine. What does all this have to do with *me*?"

"I'm getting to that. First we need a diagnosis. After all, how do you know that the same condition that led to the slippage of your spine won't lead to slippage of other bony structures? What if the bones in your legs go next? Or your skull?"

"Gosh, do these things really happen?"

"Rarely, of course, but strange things do happen."

"I know."

“I have a hypothesis for what has happened to your spine, Professor Ikota, but first I’d like to put you under observation for a while and then we’ll see.”

“Come on, Doctor Foramen, you can level with me. What do I have to lose?”

“Oh, you still have a lot to lose, Professor. A lot to lose. Expecting any raises? Sabbaticals? Travel grants? How about a promotion? Or just to be on a good, friendly footing with your chairman and your colleagues? How’d you like to lose that? Professor, you still have a lot to lose.” The doctor’s words rang ominously. They would have sent chills down the professor’s spine if... But we do not live in the fantasyland of *If*. Our world is the cold, hard porcelain realm of human tragedy, bilious envy, black deceit, bitter backbiting, lies, diarrhea, slander, gossip and man’s unfathomable inhumanity to his fellow man. There was no *If*, and no chills went down the professor’s spine.

The doctor continued: “About seventy-five percent of all cases of *scoliosis* are idiopathic, meaning the causes are unknown, but here’s what I suspect. Here, take your pointer. And please bear in mind that this is only a hypothesis based on the few facts I know about you, your body build, your walk of life etcetera etcetera. I suspect that an incipient case of *scoliosis* developed into an advanced case of *crotalus cerastes*, commonly referred to as the sidewinder syndrome. In layman’s terms, your spine was weaving this way and that in order to gain maximum flexibility. This triggered accompanying *kyphosis* and mild to severe *lordosis*, leading to runaway degeneration of the entire vertebral column, which was most likely absorbed into the bloodstream. Add to this the psychosis that Dr. Derrida has posited. You were subconsciously aware of the vertebral deconstruction, but you suppressed it. The incident in the restroom was only the denouement -- the moment when your subconscious refused to be ignored any longer, a kind of *katharsis*. It was the way your subconscious chose to tell you that, after squirming and weaving every which way for ever so long, your spine had now abandoned you entirely.”

“??”

“!!”

“I see... So what’s next?”

“Well, let’s fit you with a good back brace and hope that the condition isn’t progressive. Are you experiencing any pain?”

“Only when I remember how those vertebrae went clinking down the toilet.”

“Are you insured?”

“Yes, I have the college insurance.”

“Good. Then I’ll give you a prescription for some pain pills. They’ll help you sleep.”

An hour later, Professor Ikota was on his way home, fitted with a comfortable back brace. Beside him on the passenger seat there rode a gallon jar of bright, pink pain pills that resembled jellybeans. He likes to take one whenever he remembers. Sometimes he takes one as a prophylactic, in order not to remember at all.

## CHAPTER TWELVE: HAM ON RYE

After the meeting, E.T. sat dejected in his office and fingered his plastic prayer beads. He had nearly two hours to kill before his Survey of Russian Literature class. He felt that he should be doing something to help Yuri Ilyich, but all seemed lost. What could he do now, after they had already voted Marmeladov out of the college? For lack of anything better to do, he went to the department office and obtained from Zoya the copy of Marmeladov's manuscript, *Dostoevsky's Secret Code*, from his file. Returning to his office, he found a small pink envelope that had been pushed beneath his door. He bent down and opened it as he shut the door. "A love note?" he thought. He felt his forehead flush, and his heart beat double-time. The envelope contained a short note typed on pink paper:

*Some students were saying that Professor Marmeladov kisses the girls in his classes. These students are mad at him because he gave them the grades they deserve. It's true that Professor Marmeladov sometimes kisses women, but he kisses them on the hand. He's from the Old World. He openly compliments women for their beauty and says that women's realm is "the realm of the heart." They hate him for this and call him a neanderthal. I do not wish that my name be revealed.*

E.T. reflected. His disappointment was tempered by the jubilant thought that Hörnerträger had been proven wrong. His first urge was to run to Hörnerträger and show him the letter. But then he foresaw Hörnerträger's reaction. *The letter was anonymous. Who was to say that E.T. hadn't written the letter himself? It was of no value as a piece of evidence.* Hörnerträger's counterarguments loomed before him like a prison fence with spools of razor wire. Having erected this in-

surmountable barrier in his own mind, E.T. quickly concluded that the only avenue of action was to do nothing. This avenue of action -- which was his customary avenue of action in times of crisis as well as in peacetime -- brought him a measure of comfort, and the initial alarm which he had felt upon receiving the letter now subsided and his breathing gradually returned to normal.

He locked the door and switched the lights off, according to his habit. This was a precaution which he took at all times other than his official office hour on Mondays and Wednesdays from 2:00 to 3:00, which he usually shaved to forty-five minutes by arriving out of breath and ten minutes late and leaving five minutes early. Now he sat back in his recliner, leafed through *Dostoevsky's Secret Code* and slowly began deciphering Yuri Ilyich's handwriting, which was complicated in some places by the poor quality of the photocopy and in others by what appeared to be wine stains and tobacco burns. E.T. skipped forward to Chapter Six, which dealt with *The Brothers Karamazov*. Among all of Dostoevsky's works he was most familiar with this novel, which happened to be the current topic of his Russian literature course. He was surprised to find that this part of the manuscript was followed by chapters about Ivan Goncharov and Ivan Bunin, but he returned to Chapter Six and began to work his way through the treacherous script, which was uneven and unpredictable, with twisting thickets of Cyrillic that were reminiscent of the mossy forests of the Russian North. E.T. ventured cautiously into those thickets, hoping to find his way back by class time.

Meanwhile, down the hallway, Gogo Puzaty, the exchange instructor from Moscow, raised his little fist to knock on Hörnerträger's door. His first name was actually Igor (pronounced 'Eager'), but students had dubbed him 'Gogo,' a variation on the Russian nickname Gogochka. He had just learned of the vote on Marmeladov's tenure from Zoya and decided the time was ripe to cash in on the situation. He was not gladdened by Moscow's long summer evenings or by the majestic poplars which lined the broad boulevards leading to the outskirts of the capital. He was not gladdened by the doves

at Komsomol Pond or by the familiar square where one could sit in Pushkin's immortal shadow and watch as Moscow scurried about her business. He wanted none of this. His goal was to stay in Hogtown. He had cringed and fawned and groveled to get this far. Now his sole desire was to tighten his toehold and consolidate his gains. Then, perhaps, he would climb even higher.

As the decision on Marmeladov's tenure drew near, he began to lose sleep. His lowly position as an exchange instructor hardly enabled him to eke out a living. He was forced to supplement his income with part-time work in the murky waters of Lake Apopka, where his primary task was to simulate drowning victims for lifeguard classes. The humiliation of being helplessly towed again and again from the muddy water and then resuscitated belly-up on the shoreline was exacerbated by Puzaty's fear of alligators, whose numbers had grown so suddenly that year. The time was now right, it seemed, to take matters into his own hands.

He knocked three times on Hörnerträger's door and soon found himself seated before the chairman's enormous oak desk. Hörnerträger continued to type as he spoke with Puzaty, explaining that he was drafting an urgent letter to the dean concerning the question of Marmeladov's tenure.

"Yes," Puzaty ventured timidly, "I heard that Dr. Marmeladov will be leaving."

"Unfortunately, this appears to be the case. Dr. Stableboy told me that you have nothing positive to say about Marmeladov."

Puzaty cleared his throat. "Dr. Stableboy is an honest man," he replied.

"Well, I must say, Helweena and I quite concur with your view. In my letter to the dean I have added a brief word reflecting your evaluation -- anonymously, of course."

"I am happy to be of assistance," said Puzaty. "And if there is anything I can do in the future..."

"Have you ever thought about moving up to a full-time position?"

“Why, I’ve never given this any thought, but now that you mention it, I do know some techniques for increasing enrollments in the department. First, we eliminate Dr. Marmeladov’s unrealistic expectations, especially in the first-year courses. We can pack them in like sardines! Dr. Marmeladov frightens them away from the language with his strict grading. The students can be brought to love the language by awarding them high grades. They need positive reinforcement. They are young and fragile and must be treated gently. I would propose a grading system which eliminates D’s and F’s and incorporates C’s only as a form of mildly negative encouragement for the worst truants.”

“Well, maybe a rare D or F for a student who skips the entire course?”

“Precisely! I’ve already experimented with a system where I use only A, A-, A--, A---, A---- and B+. The results have been quite satisfactory. In more respects than one. Not only is the attitude of the students more positive, but the instructor also receives higher evaluations from the students.”

“This is the kind of thing Helweena and I have urged Marmeladov to do. A gentleman’s C for those who come to class and seem to be making some sort of effort. But Marmeladov -- what a bonehead! He doesn’t understand what we Germans understand about a department. Above all, it is vital for a department to run smoothly, like a finely-tuned and well-oiled mechanism. Where is the fine tuning if the chairman is constantly assailed by students with complaints about the unreasonable grading of a single renegade Russian instructor? Where is the oil, eh?”

Puzaty praised the chairman for his keen insight and intuitive understanding of the finer points. They spoke at greater length as Hörnerträger completed his letter. Both were pleased to find a colleague who shared similar views. True, Puzaty’s pleasure was tempered by a nerve-racking fear that he might slip and fall as he edged his way up the steep slope. He might accidentally give voice to a view which the chairman opposed. And the chairman’s pleasure was tempered by that genetically transmitted perspicacity that is peculiar to all department chairmen without exception -- regardless of age, nationality or

political affiliation -- when dealing with their underlings at the bottom rungs of the academic hierarchy.

Other tempered pleasantries were exchanged before Hörnerträger completed his letter. Puzaty obligingly offered to lick the envelope for his chairman and in this manner quietly helped to seal Marmeladov's fate. Hörnerträger then entrusted him with the delivery of the letter, and Puzaty set out with all due urgency to the dean's office on the sixth floor of the Tower.

Despite the intermittent clouds, it was a sweltering day and Puzaty was streaming with sweat by the time he reached the dean's office. He raised his little fist to knock on the door, where a large gold plaque "Dr. Woland, Interim Dean of Humanities" hung at an angle over Coldburn's name. But then he noticed a bronze door knocker in the shape of a dragon's head with a ring in its mouth. When he reached for the ring, the dragon's maw snapped shut, trapping his finger like a mouse-trap. He barely managed to free his finger, which stung and throbbed to beat the dickens. As he stood sucking his finger, the door slowly opened and a short, stocky fellow with extremely broad shoulders, a walleye and a single fang protruding downwards from between his thick lips greeted him in a nasal voice:

"Ah, Mr. Puzaty! We were expecting you. Come right in, come right in! It's a pleasure..." The stocky fellow extended a crusty, calloused hand. Puzaty reached out, expecting a handshake, but then the strange doorman simply snatched the letter from his left hand.

"It's a pleasure to receive such a museum piece. A cultural treasure," he explained somberly, lisping slightly because of his fang.

Woland was sitting at Coldburn's desk with a glass of pink champagne in one hand and with a shapely redhead on his knee. Her red hair seemed to flame in the sunlight which streamed in through the window. She wore a small green dress and sported a red scar on her neck. The stocky fellow with the fang and walleye placed the letter on Woland's desk.

"Thank you, Azazello," said Woland, placing his champagne aside and opening the sealed envelope with a long

Turkish dagger that gleamed in the sunlight. "Have a seat, Mr. Puzaty." Woland motioned to the side, where a skinny, gangly giant in checkered cap and suit jacket offered Gogo a chair. It was a carved wooden straight-backed chair that might have come from a monastery or -- possibly -- from an electrocution chamber.

"Make yourself comfortable," said the towering giant with an eager smile and winking through the cracked lens of his pince-nez. Meanwhile, Azazello handed Puzaty a tall glass of pink champagne.

Woland read the letter with gleeful animation, ooh-ing and ah-ing and occasionally laughing from satisfaction. "An amazing document!" he exclaimed as he reached the end of the letter. "I must say, your chairman certainly has a way with words! And his skill in guiding the evaluation process is unsurpassed. Other chairmen can learn much from his example. Especially impressive is the masterful technique of citing anonymous student complaints in order to create the impression of mayhem and imminent disaster. Not all chairmen would think of this, you know. Herr Hörnerträger is blessed with a most unusual talent. Most praiseworthy is his uncanny ability to remain silent on certain nasty points, mentioning only that which serves his purpose. Optimal economy of form -- minimum input with maximum damage. His indictment of Marmeladov's publishing record is a veritable Blitzkrieg, and the allusions to "tensions" with the students and part-time instructors especially caught my eye. ...Just who are these instructors, Mr. Puzaty?"

Gogo cleared his throat, blushed slightly and began: "Well, we have several instructors of French and German..."

"Yes, but surely this "tension" is not with the French and German instructors? ...Are *you* experiencing 'tension' with Dr. Marmeladov?"

Gogo cleared his throat again. "Well, sir, yes, it seems, there are some problems. Dr. Marmeladov's methods do not achieve good results. Dr. Hörnerträger and I have devised a plan which will increase class size by at least three hundred percent. Higher quotas can be set for Russian. We can use

more video. Money will be saved, attrition figures will fall, graduation figures will rise... But Marmeladov is not open to this sort of experimentation.”

“Young man, when we send Dr. Marmeladov packing, would you like to replace him? Of course, you would assume complete responsibility for the Russian program, providing that your chairman agrees with this idea...”

Gogo couldn't believe his ears. It was as though a defective cassette recording he had heard faintly and falteringly many times in his dreams had suddenly begun to play crisply and clearly. He swallowed deeply and mustered all the dignity that was at his disposal. “Sir, I would be honored. Of course, I wouldn't want to climb too high too fast...”

Woland interrupted him: “What do you think of this ‘discovery’ Marmeladov is supposed to have made? Something about Elijah the Prophet in Dostoevsky?...”

“Well, actually it's nothing new, really. It's been common knowledge in Russia for a long time. Many studies of Dostoevsky have dealt with Elijah. Marmeladov tends to overstate the importance of his own work. If I had had the time and funding, I could have found just about everything that Marmeladov claims to have found.”

“Well, it's certainly reassuring that the department is virtually unanimous in its evaluation of this quaint old fellow...” Woland suddenly became distracted, searching the desktop and desk drawers for something important which he had misplaced. “Hella,” he asked the redhead, who continued to sit on his knee, stroking his hair and shoulders. “Where is my ham on rye?”

“You must have left it up on the Tower.”

Woland continued to ransack the drawers of Coldburn's desk. “That's funny. I was certain I left it here. No...” He pulled up a yo-yo from the middle drawer, then a slingshot, and finally a long, canary yellow scarf that seemed to never end as Woland unravelled it from its nesting place in the top drawer. Then he reached into the bottom drawer with both hands and extracted a black rabbit, which he quickly placed in Hella's soft lap. “No, it's nowhere here. Hmm... Hella must be right. I guess it's still up on the Tower.”

“Would you like me to go get it for you, sir?” Puzaty volunteered. His overheated imagination quickly wove a heroic tapestry of unparalleled proportions: Puzaty and Woland side by side as guests of honor at the Rotary Club with Woland pointing to a steeply climbing graph as the Rotarians bestow adoring gazes and grateful applause upon Puzaty, who continues to humbly sip his cocktail.

“Oh, it’s an awfully steep climb to the top of the Tower. It will set a weaker man’s head to spinning. I couldn’t ask you...”

Puzaty rose from his electric chair. “No problem, sir. I’d be happy to fetch your ham on rye for you.”

“Oh, no, please! Let’s call Behemoth and let him fetch it. I don’t think you can manage a climb that steep. Korovyev, what do you think?”

“I quite agree, messire. The climb is too steep.”

“See?” Woland concluded. “It’s too steep.”

But Puzaty was already heading for the door. Korovyev hailed him: “Oh, wait a minute! Be sure and finish your champagne!”

Puzaty accepted the half-empty glass of champagne from Korovyev, emptied it in one gulp and raced out the door. Soon he was clambering up the steep, twisting stairway that led to the top of the Tower. He raced up the first two flights and the sweat began streaming down his neck. After the third flight he experienced a sudden fatigue that he had never known before. “Must be the champagne,” he figured. On the fourth flight his heart began to pound harder and harder. His legs felt like quivering rubber props that were ready to give way beneath him. He wanted only to lie down on the the stairway and sleep, sleep!

But no! The ham on rye! He must fetch the ham on rye! His head began to throb with every heartbeat. The stairs began to throb in unison with the throbbing in his head. They stretched wide like the steps of a cathedral and then they shrank narrow like a catacomb, so narrow that he could barely squeeze his way higher. It became harder and harder. His progress slowed until finally he dropped to his knees and crawled higher, his head bowed and his buttocks raised to the

heavens. The stairs began to undulate like waves on the sea and to expand and fold like the bellows of an accordion. At times he had to hold on for dear life as gaping canyons opened beneath him. Horror gripped him. He could hear his heart beat like a rubber plunger in a thick cloaca. He was engulfed by multicolored clouds which blurred his vision.

The final spiralling flights of stairs kept stretching higher and higher like an accordion, but he crawled onward, never relenting. For a moment he paused to catch his breath and give his straining heart a brief respite. He pressed his cheek to the cool cement stairway and wondered whether he had the strength to make it. Buffeted by doubt, he conjured up a vision of his final goal and struggled on, frightened by ominous figures crouching in the dark niches of the tower as though ready to pounce on him, armed with deadly knives.

Finally, as he slithered across the final step -- there it was, the coveted ham on rye resting on a silver platter. It sat serenely on a cement podium atop the Tower beside a single lounge chair. A rainbow seemed to rise from the cement altar, arching up the little pennant pole and into the sky above. Puzaty squinted as he eyed the awesome ham on rye, which undulated magically like a mirage on a hot day. Cloudlets swirled through the air in magically changing pastels. Puzaty rose to his feet and staggered toward the object of his journey. At this moment, the chimes rang out two o'clock. Puzaty jumped in fright, but then recovered his equilibrium and reached for the prized ham on rye. As he touched the soft, cool slice of bread with his fingertips, the chimes struck up the hymn of the hour, which happened to be "This Magic Moment." Puzaty raised the ham on rye to his nostrils in order to partake of the divine aroma. But something seemed odd about this sandwich -- something ephemeral, mysterious and hard to define. Gogo lifted the upper slice of bread ever so slightly in order to peer inside. A tiny doubt took root amid the nerve cells of his brain and then quickly sprouted as a sneaking suspicion. Then, suddenly, his suspicion blossomed into full-blown horror as the ham swelled and burgeoned into... into a wriggling, screaming pig! He found himself face to face with a hairy, grunting snout. He grappled with the porker, struggling

to hold it under his arm, but the writhing beast was slippery from the mayonnaise, mustard and tomato and he squirted out of Puzaty's arms and hid behind the cement "altar." Puzaty pursued the porker, who kept wedging himself into the corners and squirming from his grasp. Moreover, the pig seemed to grow by leaps and bounds even as the chase ensued. When the beast leaped up onto the altar and gazed swinishly at his pursuer (lettuce and tomato still clung suavely to his prickly head), Puzaty resolved to make a Herculean effort. He lunged with all his might and with all the surprise he could muster. The porker leaped from his pedestal, but then his hooves momentarily lost traction on the smooth cement floor as he raced for the stairway. Realizing it was now or never, Puzaty dived and clutched the hog by the rear legs, but this actually seemed to help the beast gain traction. Off he flew down the twisting stairway, dragging Puzaty behind him. Puzaty hung on for dear life, refusing to release his prey. His teeth and chin bore the brunt of each fall as he sledged on his belly from stair to stair. By the time they reached ground level, he was beaten senseless. The blood trickled from his nose and mouth, and his shattered teeth littered the lower levels of the stairway. The ham on rye, it goes without saying, got away, fleeing in the direction of Hog Creek with lettuce and tomato still clinging miraculously to his ears.

Puzaty's teeth were later repaired by one of the finest dentists on Moscow's Karl Marx Prospekt with bridgework that is reminiscent of the Santa Monica Freeway. He uses a special cologne to keep his bridges clean. He now avoids stairways, preferring the elevator. He never speaks of his attempt to scale the Tower, but in his sad, furtive eyes one can sometimes read the retrospective realization that the Tower had indeed proven to be steeper than he had supposed.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN: MORE BRIDGES

As Puzaty was being whisked off to the hospital, another hopeful visitor was already conferring with Miss Hella, interim Dean of Women's Issues, whose office was right beside Woland's. Frau Frau wasted no time in building some bridges of her own. She sat in an armchair facing Miss Hella's desk. A leopard skin lay on the floor just behind her chair, its fangs bared in her direction. As she had entered the office, her eyes had been so intent on their own prey that she did not notice the claws and glaring eyes of the jungle cat.

"I find it very gratifying," she began, "that a woman has been appointed new Dean of Women's Issues. Frankie was gay, of course, and that's certainly to his credit, but it's not quite the same thing, after all. I think you know what I mean... I mean, there are certain things that only a woman can understand."

"...For example?" Hella replied.

"Well... menopause?"

"...Ah, I see what you mean! Or take diamonds. Now there's another topic that men simply refuse to understand. If only you could have seen the brooch we found last week in a little shop in Rumania! It was gorgeous! A black widow -- onyx on a diamond web! Six hundred sixty seven little diamonds! Oh, I would give anything for that brooch! But Woland refused to pay. He says it was a little overdone. 'A little overdone'! Men do not understand anything when it comes to diamonds!" Hella lamented, pommeling the desktop with her diamond-spangled fists.

"Yes, I think I understand your predicament," Frau Frau commiserated. "Women have been denied the means of production for too long. It's ironic when you think of it, considering our superior reproductive powers."

"Reproductive power! Precisely!" Hella agreed.

Helga felt she was finally making headway. She continued: "Now women are finally seeking empowerment, and men

fight it. You were only asking for a little empowerment, you know?”

A momentary pause ensued as Hella strained to read Frau Frau’s thoughts. “Well, actually, what I was asking for, sweetie, was that diamond brooch. I wouldn’t trade that brooch for one ounce of your empowerment. But have it your way.”

“Are you and Dr. Woland married?”

“Oh, my goodness, the nepotism rules would never allow that! We have our own arrangement.”

“My husband and I also have a liberated relationship...”

“Yes, when we flew into Hogtown, we saw that swank mansion you live in. You managed to liberate him from that? You have a very liberated husband, wherever he is!”

“No, really, my husband is very open-minded. He’s not one of those sexists like that Marmeladov...”

“Marmeladov?”

“Yes, Yuri Marmeladov. One young woman in our Women’s Issues office had all kinds of complaints against Marmeladov. I took them straight to the meeting on Marmeladov’s tenure.”

“Before Mr. Marmeladov had a chance to reply?”

“Miz Hella, there was absolutely no doubt about the truth of the claims. They have reached us from several sources. And the horrible things that he has done! As spokeswoman for Women’s Issues -- and for all women at the college -- I couldn’t just stand idly by and watch as this terrible harassment continues. I had to take decisive action.”

“By all means! I mean, we women have got to fight by any means that are at our disposal. Sometimes you have to scratch and claw... a kick in the groin... a knife in the back... We’re the weaker sex, after all. They’ve got to give us a handi-cap.”

“Actually, recent studies have shown that women are really stronger than men. It’s just that strength was always measured by traditional male standards. We now realize that women have far more endurance, for example...”

“I quite agree. You should see Woland when we go shopping. You know, like out at the mall? I can shop for hours and hours, while he’s had all he can take after twenty minutes.

You don't need any scientific experiments to prove that point. We women have known that for a long time."

"Miz Hella, what do you think of the future of Women's Issues here at the college?"

"Well, I think that as long as there are women, there will be women's issues. We're here to stay, aren't we?"

"Would it be possible to expand our women's curriculum soon? Introduce a Ph.D. and an endowed chair in Women's Studies? Possibly two?"

"...Does it have to be a full-figured woman? Can't a small gal like you do the job?"

"??"

"This Marmeladov has really put a bee in your bonnet, hasn't he?"

"I'm an engaged woman. I mean, I'm engaged in the struggle for our piece of the action. Women's rights and nothing less. Men's rights and nothing more. This Marmeladov has been kissing women and telling them they're beautiful. I would like to see the college make a strong statement. Is there some way that the funds allocated for his position might be transferred to our program?"

"Of course, there is. Just ask Mister Marmeladov to write you a check."

"Oh, come on. I'm serious."

"So am I. Dead serious. Have you tried it?"

"??"

"You don't know until you've tried, do you? Listen, sweetie, let me give you a little piece of advice. You know, woman to woman?... Go get yourself a new man -- you know, one with hormones this time."

Frau Frau rose to leave. She was not pleased with the bridge she had just built. In fact, she was so unsure of her footing that she tripped slightly on the leopard's paw as she turned to leave. Noticing the fierce glass eyes and snarling yellow fangs for the first time, she gave a tiny squeal and her heart skipped a few beats. As she opened the door, Hella called out, fingering her emerald pendant in gold setting:

“Oh, Miz Frau? This Mister Marmeladov... He sounds like an interesting man... When you see him, would you tell him I’d like to meet him?...”

Frau Frau was consumed by raging flames of anger. There was an incendiary crash as she slammed the door. Her bridges burned behind her. Outside, the student band struck up the Colonel Bogey March as Frau Frau, still fuming, quick-stepped back to her office. A majorette in tight shorts and tassled shoes flung her baton high into the air. As it descended, the rubber ends burst into flame, and the girl dodged the spinning torch as it fell to the lawn. The metal baton seemed to twist and squirm in the grass before finally assuming a horseshoe shape. Smoke rose from the scorched grass and onlookers gathered around to marvel at the mysterious phenomenon.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN: A NASTY INCIDENT

That afternoon, Stableboy set out for the Hogtown Baptist Church, where he was supposed to pick up his fifteen-year-old daughter Candy after choir practice. Thanks to the meeting on Marmeladov's tenure, he was already thirty minutes late as he turned from Cornbin Street onto East Marsh Road. Stableboy is a cautious man who avoids risks at all costs. Even though he was late, he drove just under the 40-mile-per-hour speed limit as he glided down the highway, which cuts across the marshland straight as an arrow. When he arrived at the church, the choir had already dispersed and Candy was nowhere to be found. Only the organist remained inside, continuing to ply the levers and keys with the passionate gusto of a barroom reveller. The victorious tones of "Bringing in the Sheaves" reverberated through the church walls as though rising inexorably from a hollow abyss.

Stableboy approached the large glass door and shielded his eyes in order to peer inside the church, but then he realized that the glass was actually a mirror. His own pensive reflection, balding and with scraggly beard, peered out at him darkly. When he reached down to open the glass door, he found it locked. For a moment, his eyes met once again with those of his reflection and in that brief moment he had an evil premonition -- as though a tiny crack had suddenly sundered the safe, porcelain-smooth reality in which he moved. Then, much to his astonishment, his reflection suddenly broke ranks with the laws of physics and obsequiously opened the glass door from inside.

"Candy left with the choir director, sir," his reflection explained politely.

Stableboy's jaw fell open. He squinted his eyes and shook his head, suspecting some sort of mirage effect. But his scraggly reflection continued to stand there before him, studying his face with commiseration.

"You are experiencing a certain anguish?" his reflection asked quietly. There was a note of sincere concern in his voice.

He was dressed precisely like Stableboy, only his suit appeared crumpled and overdue for the dry cleaner's. For some reason, God knows why, Stableboy's attention was caught by a dark stain on the toe of his reflection's white shoe -- precisely like the stain on his own white shoe, only darker. It was one of those little defects that are visible only to the wearer, but remain irksome nonetheless. His eye dwelled for a moment on his reflection's shoe before he realized that this similarity, at least, was all in the order of things.

"No, I'm fine," he replied, rather confused by this strange turn of events.

"Today you voted?" the reflection asked.

Stableboy was thunderstruck. How did this suspicious fellow, who was nearly his identical twin, learn about today's vote? Stableboy stood motionless in the doorway, hoping desperately that all the choir members would suddenly leap from their hiding places and the odd but all-too-familiar stranger would remove his cleverly designed latex mask and reveal his true identity. But, alas, the choir did not leap from the holy shadows, there was no gleeful laughter and there was no mask.

"Why not come on inside and talk about it?" the crumpled stranger urged. "You know... get it off your chest."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Stableboy mumbled as he turned sharply and headed across the parking lot toward his shiny black BMW. But before he even reached the three crosses that rise from the grassy island in the sea of asphalt, the annoying stranger managed to catch up with him and latch on.

"Are you headed back into town?" the unsavory fellow inquired, obviously hoping to catch a ride. Stableboy quickly decided to give him the slip and altered his course ever so slightly.

"No, actually I'm headed over there," he replied, motioning toward the grove of trees situated just beyond a thin strip of pastureland. And he marched across the parking lot, expecting to be free of the unpleasant stranger.

But the stranger stayed with him. “Ah, that cemetery?” he asked. “I’ve got some business there myself. I’ll accompany you, if you don’t mind.”

And the bearded twins set out across the pasture. Stableboy inwardly cursed his failed strategy and groped for another tactic to rid himself of this leech. His anger redoubled as they trudged through mud and fresh, aromatic horse biscuits. His white shoes became soggy and black. Stableboy marched with quick, assertive strides, still hoping to shake his unwanted companion, who kept getting bogged down in the muddy pasture, breathing heavily and pumping his arms briskly as he made haste to catch up.

“Well, you certainly have no reason to regret anything that you said at those meetings. You shouldn’t let it bother you.”

Stableboy looked askance at the pudgy fellow, who just then was navigating his way around a large black puddle. How did he know there was more than one meeting? “It doesn’t bother me,” he replied, attempting to give his voice a cheerful ring.

“That’s good to hear. I mean, you simply did what you had to do, right? You didn’t do it to tighten your alliance with Hörnerträger, did you? (You know, just for the sake of your own promotion.) You simply stated what a scholar has to say in situations like this: that you wouldn’t want your daughter to take a class from Yuri Ilyich. That’s simply an objective statement of fact. Right?...”

Their eyes met, but Stableboy did not reply. He sensed that this was some sort of provocation. When they reached the far side of the pasture, the scraggly stranger obsequiously held open the barbed wires of the fence so that Stableboy might pass through more easily, but just as Stableboy’s round buttocks maneuvered their way between the barbed wires, the gracious but clumsy stranger accidentally allowed the top wire to slip from his grasp, snapping against Stableboy’s rear pockets and piercing his behind. Stableboy groaned and fell against the lower wire as well, tearing the white woolen crotch of his slacks and drawing blood somewhere in the region of his shorts. After a short struggle and with the gracious help of his

irksome companion, he managed to extract himself from the fence's barbed clutches. The nervous chatter continued as Stableboy now found himself in the cool shade of the cemetery.

"Anyway, you had every right to make that comment about Marmeladov's arrogance. Every right! I mean, who's in a better position than you to judge? You've read Dostoevsky, right?... Right?"

Stableboy only cast an angry glance in his companion's direction. His companion seemed to interpret this as a positive reply and nodded as he continued: "Right, you've read Dostoevsky. True, it might have been when you were in high school, but who will disagree with your statement that 'the biggest textual discovery in the study of Dostoevsky' is an outrageously arrogant claim? It is arrogant! Even if it's true, it's arrogant!"

They passed among the mossy tombstones until they came to a freshly dug grave. A backhoe stood nearby. The grave was deep and square -- precisely sculpted with shovels that were perched in the dirt piles along both sides of the grave. The buffoonish stranger leaped awkwardly across the grave from one dirt pile to the other. Stableboy stepped up onto the dirt pile on the near side and examined the gravedigger's work.

The annoying chatterbox continued babbling as Stableboy absentmindedly kicked clods of black clay into the grave: "I mean, what's everyone supposed to do? Abstain like Ikota? What if everyone abstained? What kind of a vote would you have then? And what would the dean think? That damned Ikota never stands up like a man! Claiming he didn't know enough about Marmeladov! He had two years to get familiar with Marmeladov's theories. That wasn't enough for him! He must want bird's milk!"

Stableboy glanced across the grave and raised his eyebrows as though to say, "Bird's milk?"

"Bird's milk?" the soiled and crumpled stranger echoed his thoughts. "Oh, that's just an expression that Yuri Ilyich always uses. Never heard it before? It's like 'eggs in your beer.' But I doubt you're very interested in old Russian lore, are you, Professor Stableboy?"

“Look,” Stableboy finally retorted, “I don’t know who you are or who leaked information to you, but those meetings are confidential and you have no right to know anything that went on there.”

“Well, I beg to differ with you there. Those meetings are confidential to protect the candidate for promotion -- to ensure that the false and slanderous things that you say about him are not bandied about for public consumption.”

“Slander?! Am I guilty of slander?!...”

“Did I say you’re guilty of slander, Professor Stableboy? That was a collective ‘you’ I used. It referred to nobody specifically. After all, it was the whole gang that teamed up against him. It took the whole department to put all those nails in his coffin.”

“Coffin? Are you trying to imply that we weren’t fair?”

“‘Arrogance’?... And your fear for your daughter, remember?... Who is claiming that you weren’t being fair?... That’s science, right? The scalpel of reason. Who’s to say that the operation wasn’t done cleanly? It wasn’t your everyday amputation, after all. Everything according to the highest standards, correct?”

“Look, I’ve had about enough of your caustic irony...”

“Professor Stableboy, my goodness! I’m afraid you’ve misunderstood me... That is, I’ve done an awful job making myself clear. I really must apologize. My intentions are most honorable and I really have your welfare at heart. What I meant was: congratulations!”

“Congratulations?...”

“Congratulations!”

“??”

“Congratulations! You’ve put the man away!”

The unpleasant stranger grinned and nodded toward the head of the grave. Stableboy noticed for the first time a marble tombstone partially concealed by the pile of dirt, which had temporarily buried it halfway. He could make out part of the inscription: *Yuri Ilyich Ma...*

“You’ve obviously rigged this,” Stableboy muttered.

“Wait a minute! Whose idea was it to walk to the cemetery? It was *your* idea, Professor Stableboy, remember? There’s no way I could have predicted that, is there? No, this grave is as real as you and I, Professor Stableboy. And you and I know who put the man away and how it was done.”

“You weren’t at the meetings. You weren’t invited. Those meetings were strictly confidential. You had no right to be there -- and you have no right to judge our decision. I ask you to kindly refrain from any further comment on this topic. According to the rules of the Magic Kingdom, the whole topic is hopelessly shrouded in secrecy -- hopelessly for you, that is...”

“But, you see, I do know what was said there, and... well, I have my own inborn needs and urges, do you understand? I have a right to my urges, too, you know. Sometimes I have the urge to prostrate myself right on the crosswalk there by the college chapel and yell out at the top of my voice all I know... Would you like me to do that, Professor Stableboy?...”

Stableboy was incensed. He raised his shovel and shouted: “Shut your trap, you little imp! You filthy little parasite!”

But his opponent only grinned with satisfaction and continued to chatter: “‘Shut your trap’? There’s no trap, Professor Stableboy. There’s a grave between us!”

“Shut up!” Stableboy yelled.

“There’s a grave between us, Stableboy -- and on my side there’s more!” The repugnant stranger touched the soiled white suit lapel over his heart with the fingers of his right hand.

Stableboy’s face flushed and he squinted his eyes with anger. He raised his shovel, threatening to strike the stranger, who only continued to smile and taunt him.

“On my side there’s more! On my side there’s more, Stableboy!...”

Stableboy leaped across the grave and dealt the impudent buffoon a glancing blow to the temple. The sharp edge of the shovel evidently cut deep and clean. A neat red ribbon of blood appeared across the left side of the victim’s head. Blood of a

darker hue oozed from the left ear as the stranger slumped onto the pile of dirt. With a deft motion of his dirty white shoe, Stableboy pushed the motionless body into the grave. Then he covered the body with about thirty shovelfuls of black clay, neatly wiped the shovel handle with his spotless white handkerchief and hastily headed back to the church. Nobody had seen him in the cemetery. Nobody would know. It would be his own little secret.

As he drove back into town (carefully observing the 40 mile-per-hour speed limit), he experienced a sinking sensation each time he glanced into the rear-view mirror, anticipating that his reflection might run awry once again. But his fears proved to be unwarranted. His reflection dutifully mimicked his every move, observing all the rules and high standards of decency and decorum that are recognized throughout our civilized world.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN: E.T.'S LECTURE

It was with great difficulty that E.T. tramped in thought through the thickets of Marmeladov's manuscript. It was a shadowy, slumbering forest illuminated by sheets of rippling lightning that harrowed the turbid sky. E.T. had to continually backtrack into the early chapters in order to get his bearings and then carefully retrace his steps back to *The Brothers Karamazov* (Chapter Six.) He advanced cautiously, aware that he was on foreign soil and that certain foreigners, according to ancient legend, had lost their way and perished for all of eternity when led into these dreaming, mossy thickets beneath spectacular skies.

This foray into the backwoods of one man's imagination was a new experience for E.T. In the past, whenever he read a colleague's work, he would dutifully skim page after page until he got the general drift, and then he would pronounce his inevitable verdict: *very interesting*. But now, for the first time in his academic career, he felt there was a special urgency in his reading, that it might even be a question of life and death -- not so much for Yuri Ilyich as for himself. He was reading like he had never read before -- not just for the general drift, but for all the flora and fauna along the forest trail, for specific knots and threads in the tapestry of the trees, for anything that would show the way into the forest and then lead him back out again. This he was doing for the first time in his life.

But by 3:00 in the afternoon he had to exit Marmeladov's forest of signs and hurry off to his Russian literature class. This time he was armed with at least a few of Yuri Ilyich's findings. Even if it was too late for Yuri Ilyich, perhaps it was not too late for *him*.

As usual, about half of the 341 students enrolled in the course were assembled for that day's lecture. The enrollments in this class were the highest in the college because Dr. Poogh was a cloud in trousers. He was as soft as a baby blanket and

rarely gave grades lower than a B-, provided one met the strict requirement of taking the tests on time.

On this day, as was customary in the class, most students sat toward the rear of the auditorium and chatted with friends or read the student newspaper. As he walked to class, E.T. sensed more clearly than ever that something was amiss in the Magic Kingdom. He caught a glimpse of the limp and bloodied Puzaty as they inserted him into the ambulance and rushed him off to the hospital. Then from a distance he saw the baton mysteriously catch fire on the college lawn. He knew these were Woland's antics, signs of worse things to come...

According to his habit, E.T. felt for his fly as he entered the auditorium, eliciting the usual giggles from the girls sitting along the center aisle. Mounting the rostrum, he fished for his paperback copy of *The Brothers Karamazov* in his fat briefcase, but then realized it had been in his hand when he entered the auditorium. Yes -- there it was lying on the podium, where he had just placed it. He spread his short, pudgy legs slightly for balance and, folding his hands behind him, he quickly scanned the mostly empty back row where the football players always sat on exam days and the front row where the football players' tutors took copious notes. Then he aimed his inspired gaze at that indefinable point where the back wall meets the ceiling and began his oration.

As usual, E.T.'s lecture resounded over a constant droning of voices as students continued their polite chit-chat, periodically establishing brief intergalactic contact with E.T.'s oration. In short, they listened to E.T. in the same style that had characterized E.T.'s reading of his colleagues' work. But this was an unusual day because E.T. had arrived with something new. Perhaps it was too late to save Marmeladov's job, but he would try to save his own skin!

After a brief preamble summarizing for the benefit of truants and slaggards all the essential points of the previous lecture, E.T. announced that today he would jump from the abstract theories about Dostoevsky "in general" to a different

aspect of *The Brothers Karamazov* -- the concrete details which form the vast tapestry of the novel itself.

*The First Part of E.T.'s Oration*

*First, allow me to say that the climactic moment of Dmitri Karamazov's arrest following the murder of his father comes at a village known as Mókroye. The name of this village is of great significance for our understanding of *The Brothers Karamazov*. In Russian, this word means 'wet' -- and you will notice that it is during a rainstorm that Dmitri is arrested. Then, when Dmitri reflects upon his arrest, he says that if it had not been for this 'thunder' he would not have seen the light.*

*These tiny details are threads in an intricate network of symbolism that is centered around Elijah the Prophet as he was perceived in the Russia of Dostoevsky's time. Elijah was seen as a benefactor of mankind who rides across the sky in his fiery chariot and dispenses rain for our survival. But at the same time he is a vengeful punisher who starts fires and flings down lightning bolts to remind us of our sins and the Last Judgment.*

*Why, you might ask, does Elijah bring suffering? The answer to this question is that God's creation is a universe where Good and Evil are ever-present, where man is a sinful creature who can redeem his sins only through suffering. If you want to know why God chose this setup, you will have to ask God Himself. If you don't believe in God, I suggest you ask a friend who does to get in touch with God and try to get to the bottom of it. I do not know why God created everything in such an imperfect fashion. Possibly God wears a patch over one eye -- that would help to explain the situation. That's what a rabbi once told me, but I don't know that for a fact. At any rate, I refuse to be held responsible for God's imperfections.*

*Dmitri Karamazov's arrest -- during the storm -- is his first step along the road to suffering and redemption. The village name and the storm are not accidental, meaningless details, as you might have thought. They proceed from the folklore and mythology of the Russian people. So, too, does*

*Dmitri's dream-recollection of fire victims, which comes as he is being driven back to Skotoprigonevsk. Half asleep, he remembers fire victims, women and children whom he had once seen on the side of a country road. They epitomize Elijah's cruel world of suffering, against which Ivan and Dmitri have rebelled. Dmitri is an abused and abandoned child. He expects and deserves better treatment from his father -- just as many of you expect better treatment from your professors and many of us expect a better arrangement from God. He could have let us live a few hundred years instead of just sixty or seventy. And wouldn't it be bad enough without cancer and heart attacks? And most of all, as Ivan asks: why do innocent children have to suffer?*

*After his arrest, Dmitri comes to a spiritual realization that his rebellion against his father is also a rebellion against God. This is not to say that old Fyodor Karamazov is a virtuous man. He is a despicable man. But the problem of his cruelty to his children mirrors in a microcosm the problem of God's 'cruelty' to His children. And just as God employs Elijah the Prophet as a kind of divine policeman or tax collector who cracks his lightning-whip to urge men to pay their debts to God, so Fyodor Karamazov enlists the aid of Nikolai Ilyich Snegiryov to help collect on Dmitri's debts. The name 'Ilyich' means 'son of Elijah.' Snegiryov lives on Lake Street (tears of suffering and the rain of Elijah!) with his unfortunate family of invalids. He has red hair (reminiscent of fire) and a thick beard which the children call a 'sponge' when they mock him (water again). His son Ilyusha (again 'Elijah'!) slowly dies of consumption. He is a living embodiment of God's cruel order, of Elijah's world of suffering that can be comprehended only by God, who might or might not wear a patch over his eye.*

E.T. suddenly noticed that a number of students were flipping through their copies of *The Brothers Karamazov* with expressions of puzzlement on their faces. A skinny boy in glasses raised his hand and the droning of voices grew quieter as a new voice suddenly rang out:

“Professor Poogh, in my copy there is no Mókroye!”

“What edition do you have there, son?” asked E.T.

“Same edition as you, Professor Poogh.” The boy showed the cover of his book. “In my copy, Dmitri goes to Las Vegas on a steamer and gives ‘em the slip at night when they try to nab him in a brothel!”

E.T. blushed with embarrassment.

“Son, let me see your copy.” He read the passage which the boy had highlighted in iridescent pink. Sure enough, there was Dmitri Karamazov in Las Vegas!

Straightaway a young lady sitting on the center aisle joined in: “In my copy, Dmitri dumps Grushenka in Sukhoi Posyolok and splits the loot with Smerdyakov. And there’s no rainstorm. It’s a sunny day when he and Smerdyakov escape to Baden Baden.”

There was laughter and giggling. Another student found further discrepancies: “Dr. Poogh, in my copy the sick little boy is named Keith. His father is an Englishman known as ‘Oily Mouth’ who would sell his soul to the Devil to rise another rung in the civil service. The boy is bitten by a stray dog and catches rabies when his father forces him to walk the dogs of all the high-ranking civil servants. Old Fyodor Karamazov hires a German doctor who miraculously saves the boy and then old Karamazov gives money for a hospital. That’s when all the kids yell, ‘Hurrah for Karamazov!’”

There was jubilation. The laughter grew more frequent. E.T. moved around the auditorium, checking to see if the students were telling the truth. Sure enough, each copy was different from the version he knew. None seemed to agree!... The sporadic sprinkles of laughter turned into a full-blown storm. The students seemed more amused by E.T.’s confusion and consternation than by the ludicrous discrepancies in the texts. They seemed to assume that the variant readings were somehow an oversight of Professor Poogh himself. Professor Poogh had screwed up again! As E.T. continued to move about among the students, confusedly comparing his text with those of the students, spit balls began to fly, narrowly missing his bald head. Students were splitting their sides with laughter. Some were leaping from their seats and launching paper airplanes in E.T.’s direction.

“Okay, everybody,” E.T. announced. “Okay, everybody! Please give me your attention!”

The thundering merriment subsided to the roar of a small waterfall.

“Okay, listen! Now you’ve all seen a good example of deconstruction in literature. Each reader sees the text differently. Uh, but now let’s go back to *Crime and Punishment*... uh... by way of review. Those of you who have *Crime and Punishment* with you please get it out. The reason is that Elijah is right at the center of that novel, too. I didn’t go into this before because... well, because there wasn’t enough time and... well, even if Elijah is at the center of the story, he’s, well... not really *that* central.”

Those students who were paying attention exchanged confused glances.

*Part Two of E.T.’s Oration*

*If you’ll open your books to Chapter Two of Part Two, you’ll find the episode where Raskolnikov is summoned to the police station after murdering the old pawnbroker and her kid sister with an axe. Note that the assistant police superintendent is named Ilya, or Elijah. He has red hair (fire again), a thunderous gaze and he lets loose ‘with all his thunderbolts’ against a fat brothel keeper. Later in the novel, you will find that Raskolnikov confesses to this Elijah after spending the whole night wandering around Petersburg in a thunderstorm. If you count the days that pass up to this point, you find that the storm and Raskolnikov’s confession come approximately on July 20, the holiday of Elijah the Prophet. On this day, Russians always expected a thunderstorm. It was a major holiday in the Russian church calendar. Crowds flocked to the Church of Elijah in Petersburg by the tens of thousands. The thunderstorm preceding Raskolnikov’s confession is a spectacular display of Elijah’s fireworks...”*

“Professor Poogh!” the same diligent boy in glasses called out. “In my copy, Raskolnikov refuses to confess. His sister takes the rap for him, but it ends in a hung jury!”

The merriment was renewed. Another voice followed suit: “My copy says it’s the middle of January when Raskolnikov finally surrenders. There’s a blizzard outside, but no lightning.”

Laughter thundered over E.T.’s bald head as he blushed and searched frantically through the pages of his edition. Finally he found the scene at the police station. But when he tried to focus his eyes on the text, the letters all seemed to spin and go blurry. Then they stopped spinning and came back into focus -- and blurred once again. The text was changing right before his eyes! The guffaws were deafening. E.T. wanted to crawl into the speaker’s podium and hide. Wads of paper were hailing down from the rear rows, but E.T. just stood there, thunderstruck. He pushed his book aside on the podium. The pages fell open to an artist’s illustration near the end of the novel. It showed Raskolnikov, meek and muddied by the storm, standing contritely before the hot-tempered assistant police superintendent, ready to confess. But suddenly the drawing moved! The figures became animated like a cartoon! Raskolnikov’s sheepish and tortured face turned into a sly, wolfish grin as he removed an axe from beneath his overcoat and offered it to the policeman. But then he suddenly retracted the axe and split the policeman’s skull in two. He donned the dead man’s tattered cap and sat down at his desk as though preparing to look after the daily business at the station.

E.T. ducked down and tried to hide in the base of the podium, but the laughter made his ears burn as students sneaked up to the rostrum and peeked at him from each side. He took his briefcase and rushed from the auditorium. A cheer resounded as he went out the door, but he heard nothing. Images of Coldburn fried by lightning and Puzaty beaten to a bloody pulp flashed through his mind. Oh, God! Would he be next? Was it too late to save his own skin? What had he done to deserve this? Where could he possibly hide?

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN: AS DREAMS ARE MADE ON

E.T. drove straight home, donned his flannel pajamas (the ones with the Teddy bears on the pockets) and dived into bed. He was in a state of near-shock. He buried his head in the soft pillows and closed his eyes. If only it would all go away. If only he would wake up and learn that it was only a dream -- that Coldburn had not been struck by lightning, that Woland's helpers had not mutilated Coldburn's body with chainsaws, that Puzaty had not been beaten to a pulp, that the books had not suddenly changed by some sort of black magic. After all, this was the kind of stuff dreams are made of. "As dreams are made on..." E.T. repeated, striving to console himself and groping for the yellow brick road that winds its way into another reality.

Soon his wish was fulfilled. He found himself on the familiar yellow brick road. He walked along in his flannel pajamas toward the tollgate up ahead. There were many other travelers, too: men, women, children, some in their pajamas, others in their underwear, others wearing nothing at all. A milky mist rose from beneath their bare feet and rose up toward the luminescent orb that shone down through the white fog. The man in uniform at the toll booth asked for E.T.'s passport. E.T. was surprised to find it in his pajama pocket. He didn't recall placing it there before diving into bed. The guard only glanced at the passport. It even seemed to E.T. that the guard had recognized him as a frequent flier.

"Do you have anything to declare?" the guard asked in a British accent as thick as hasty pudding.

"Yes, I'd like to declare that I did vote for Dr. Marmeladov and that I'm not responsible..."

"I see," the guard interrupted him. "Visa or Mastercard?"

"Neither, I'm afraid," replied E.T.

"Nothin' to be afraid of, ol' chap!" the guard encouraged him. "I'll write out a visa for you."

The guard scribbled a few hieroglyphs on an official form and handed it to E.T. "Here," he said, "this will get you

places where others rarely go, where wisemen fear to tread. When you're ready to disembark, just click your ruby heels together and repeat: 'There's no place like home, there's no place like home.'"

"But I have no ruby heels," E.T. replied.

"Then you'll have to find yourself a good shoe store," the guard explained. He winked by way of encouragement as E.T. proceeded further. A tall fellow wearing a checkered suit and an inebriated smile ushered him through the turnstile. His face seemed familiar, but E.T. could not recall where he had seen the towering stranger.

Soon the crowd of barefoot travelers thinned out and E.T. found himself well-nigh alone. Only now and then other moving forms appeared and disappeared in the milky mist to the right and to the left. But then an elegant black coach pulled up alongside and E.T. climbed aboard.

"Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky's apartments, sir?" the coachman inquired.

"Yes! Do you think I'll find him home at this hour?" asked E.T.

The coachman opened his pocket watch and grimaced.

"Hard to say, sir. He could be home. But then again he might not be."

As E.T. pondered the weight of this reply, the coachman lashed his pair of grays and after a few sharp turns E.T. found himself gliding along the streets of Petersburg. The milky fog seemed to be lifting somewhat, but it continued to swirl here and there in thick clouds. Finally the coach came to a stop. The coachman climbed down and opened E.T.'s door. After E.T. stepped down, the coachman stood with that special, genetically controlled attentiveness which marks the solemn moment of retribution after journey's end, when the driver has successfully piloted his ship past the Sirens and Medusa's head and the passenger has safely reached his harbor.

E.T. reached into his left pajama pocket and found only a few worn and crumpled dollar bills.

"Will you accept American?" he asked.

"Mastercard."

"This is all I have," replied E.T.

“No Mastercard?!” the coachman asked in disbelief.

“This is all I brought. I... I had no idea...”

The coachman gazed at the bills blankly in dumb silence. E.T. handed him the dollars, shrugging his shoulders apologetically, and walked up to Dostoevsky’s door as the coachman continued to examine the bedraggled bills skeptically.

When E.T. knocked, an emaciated old woman finally appeared in the doorway. He suddenly felt self-conscious as her prune-like eyes slid up and down his rotund figure suspiciously.

“Ma’am, I apologize for my... uh... informal attire. But I urgently need to see Mr. Dostoevsky.”

“Fyodor Mikhailovich gets many petitioners nowadays. What is it that you need to see him for, sonny?”

“Well, it has to do with Mr. Marmeladov.”

“I see. Do you have a calling card, young man?”

“N-no...” E.T. reached into his pajama pocket. All he found besides his visa was his crumpled ballot from the vote on tenure. He handed the ballot to the old lady and wrung his plump little fingers nervously as he explained: “You see, I mainly just want to say that I voted for Marmeladov. This is my ballot. Possibly you can show that to Fyodor Mikhailovich and explain to him, and maybe then I could see him?...”

The old lady weighed the crumpled ballot in her withered little hand and then peered up skeptically at E.T. once again. Then she closed the door, disappearing inside. E.T. paced back and forth by the entry, still wringing his sweaty hands. He tried to line up his thoughts for the imminent meeting with the great master, but his thoughts refused to get in line and continued to flit about like frightened sparrows. Soon the old lady appeared in the doorway once again, this time with an offended expression on her withered old face. She handed the ballot back to E.T., commenting in a disgusted tone: “This paper has a nose in it, sir!”

E.T. couldn’t believe his burning ears. He looked down at the crumpled ballot and opened one of the folds slightly. Sure enough, there was a nose inside! His jaw fell open and he tried to stammer a defense to the offended lady:

„Ma'am, I-I... I have no idea... I-I... I assure you, I-I'm not resp...”

The old lady quietly closed the door. E.T. heard the latches clicking shut inside. He examined the nose more closely. It had evidently been severed by a super-sharp instrument because the amputated side was smooth and flat as a pancake. The nose was slightly red, like the nose of a heavy drinker. E.T. touched it with his finger. It was cool but soft and paled slightly beneath his fingertip. He had seen this nose somewhere before... Yes! Now he recognized it -- it was Marmeladov's nose!

What could he do with it? He could never face Dostoevsky with Yuri Ilyich's nose. He was frantic, but he knew that for once in his life he had to act decisively. He headed down the sidewalk, cupping his hands to form a nest for the orphaned nose. Finally he came to a bridge. Perhaps he should just toss the nose into the canal and be done with it? The dark water beckoned. E.T. reached over the balustrade and prepared to drop his nasty secret. It would sink into the thick brown water and be gone forever. Or would it? Perhaps it would float? What then? E.T.'s heart raced. Why, it would drift downstream and out to sea. No, it wouldn't drift anywhere in this stagnant, nightmarish canal. It would just bob up and down in the murky grime. They would see it. A woman would scream and they would attempt to rescue it, taking it for the nose of a drowning victim. But their long gaffs would find nothing beneath the nose. All would be disappointed and confused. They would pluck the nose from the water with a net on a long pole, and all would scratch their heads and marvel at what had been found. The nose would be their problem then. He would be free of it.

But then, just as he was about to nudge the nose from its nesting place over the balustrade, E.T. noticed a figure emerging from the fog at the other end of the bridge. Oh, there were all sorts of people on the street that day, but this one caught his eye for some reason and incited alarm. It was the cap! The brimmed cap of a policeman. E.T. instinctively retracted the nose, enfolded it inside the ballot once again and

slipped it back into his pajama pocket. The policeman strolled by leisurely, pausing for a moment to eye E.T. suspiciously.

E.T. turned and walked down the street in the direction from which the policeman had come. He glanced back furtively as he minced along and noted that the officer followed him for a few leisurely steps before giving up his halfhearted pursuit. It was as though to say, "Don't try any more of your tricks here, you scoundrel!"

E.T. passed a café. That gave him an idea. He could order a bite to eat and say that he found the nose in the borshch or in the pirozhki. He could even refuse to pay and get a free meal to boot! But no, there might be police reports, questions, accusations... He rejected that idea and shuffled onward down the street.

Soon he came to a newspaper office. "That's it!" he thought. He could place an ad in the Lost and Found section. Someone might even claim the nose. Someone in need. These things happen, after all. Not very often, of course, but they do happen. He entered the newspaper offices and finally found his way to the Lost and Found Department, where a clerk was reading that morning's edition, lost in thought. E.T. cleared his throat to get the man's attention. When this failed, he spoke up: "Excuse me, sir! I'd like to report an item."

The clerk, startled, jumped from his chair and attempted to make his way to the counter where E.T. was standing, but a small, waist-high wooden door barred his way. He disappeared into a back room and emerged a few minutes later through another door.

"You say you'd like to report something?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Well, it's a nose..."

"A nose, you say? Well, these things happen, after all. Not very often, of course, but they do happen. Not too long ago we had a fellow in here who had lost his nose. Hmm... Yours seems to be more or less in place..."

"Oh, no, I didn't lose my nose. I found one."

"Oh, well this is the *Lost* Department. *Found* is down the corridor."

E.T. set out down the corridor. It twisted and turned like a labyrinth -- seemingly forever and ever. Some parts were dark and he had to feel his way. He had to clamber through wooden scaffolding and even crawl through a brick tunnel before finally emerging into a brightly lit office with the word 'FOUND' looming above the counter. Getting rid of the nose now proved to be a very simple operation. After jotting down all the vital facts, a clerk consoled E.T.: "Well, these things happen, after all. Not very often, of course, but they do happen."

The clerk proposed the following text for the ad:  
FOUND. A NOSE. MALE. IN PAJAMA POCKET,  
BENEATH TEDDY BEAR. ALL CLAIMS CAN BE MADE  
IN OUR LOST AND FOUND OFFICES.

"And if you like," the clerk added, "we can keep the item in our safe until the owner comes to claim it."

"Why, that would be marvelous," replied E.T. (What a stroke of luck!) "Do you think it will be claimed?..."

"Well, a nose, sir... Hardly the kind of thing a fellow can do without!"

E.T. was forced to agree.

Soon he found himself on the busy downtown street once again. He set out for Dostoevsky's apartment. He knew it wasn't far. But immediately his attention was diverted by a store window where a pair of shoes with splendid ruby heels gleamed beneath the dark glass. It was Buster Brown's -- the same shoe store he remembered from his childhood! And there in the doorway was the same magic X-ray machine that showed you the bones of your feet and toes... E.T. entered the store and tried on the shoes. Unfortunately, they were size eleven, while E.T. wears size eight and a half. He left the store disappointed but resolved to find another Buster Brown store with the same shoes in his size.

As he came out into the street, he could hear shouts and noticed that people were craning their necks to see an open buggy that was gliding down the street. The gaunt, bearded fellow in the buggy appeared to be Dostoevsky. Yes! E.T. was certain. It was Dostoevsky himself! The great master's name

was on everyone's lips. E.T. froze in momentary indecision. But then he recovered his wits and set off running as fast as his fat little legs would carry him. His bare feet slapped the old cobblestones like fresh flounder on the floor of the fishmonger. For one brief moment E.T. drew even with the buggy and managed to wheeze a few words as he ran: "Fyodor Mikhailovich!... [pant, wheeze, gasp] Sir!... [pant, wheeze, gasp] I voted for him, sir..."

But Dostoevsky only raised his gray brows at the pajama-clad madman who was running a ludicrous footrace with his buggy. E.T.'s strength flagged as the buggy raced ahead and soon vanished into the fog. E.T. hailed buggy after buggy, but each driver looked askance at this stranger in pajamas and refused to stop for him. Finally he stood directly in the path of an approaching buggy and forced the driver to rein in his prancing mare. E.T. shouted as he climbed aboard: "Follow that buggy up ahead! That's Dostoevsky! I've got to speak with him!"

The driver lashed his spirited mare and they raced down the echoing street in hot pursuit of the vanished buggy. Finally it came into view but seemed to quicken its pace, giving no ground and remaining half-veiled in fog. It was a long chase that led across bridges, past shipyards and down a long, muddy highway. At last they arrived at a cathedral beyond the edge of town. The buggy which E.T. had pursued was parked beside the gateway. E.T. leaped to the ground and proceeded toward the cathedral gates, where noseless beggar women sat in rags, their calloused old hands outstretched to receive alms. But when they saw the holy simpleton enter the gateway of the cathedral, barefoot and wearing only pajamas, they crossed themselves with fervor and forced coins into the holy fool's hands and pajama pockets as he climbed the steps to enter the cathedral.

Inside it was pleasantly cool as the priest chanted the service and the candles glowed by the gilt icons. E.T. scanned the worshippers. Some stood in quiet reverence, others knelt on the floor, making the sign of the cross and bowing their heads to the cool floor. In the dome overhead, Elijah ascended into heavenly heights on a chariot of fire.

E.T. could not find Dostoevsky among the worshippers, but he knew he had to be there somewhere. His eye was drawn to a stern old man with beetle brows and wearing a long traditional Russian coat over a bright red kaftan. Beside the old man there stood a beautiful young woman whose lowered lashes seemed to veil an unfathomed sorrow. She seemed to be lost in mourning as she slowly made the sign of the cross and murmured a silent prayer. E.T. decided to cover the avenues of escape. He went back outside, passing once again between the poor, hunched beggar women who crossed themselves and forced more coins into his reluctant hands and pajama pockets. Then he waited in the shadows not far from Dostoevsky's buggy. Soon, however, the stern old man emerged from the cathedral and escorted his young companion to Dostoevsky's buggy. E.T. approached them as they climbed in.

"Excuse me," he asked. "Isn't this Mr. Dostoevsky's buggy?"

The old man only gazed at the madman in consternation before reaching into his purse and offering him a red banknote.

"This isn't Mr. Dostoevsky's buggy, sir?" E.T. repeated, heedless of the red note in his hand.

The old man began to laugh as the buggy lurched forward and circled back around to the highway.

"Fyodor Mikhailovich has passed on!" the old man's bass voice boomed. Then he broke into wild, thundering laughter as he and his meek young companion flew down the highway.

E.T.'s heart sank. Now he would never manage to tell Dostoevsky the whole story, that it wasn't his fault, that he wasn't responsible! Never! Maybe not for all eternity! He wasn't quite sure how long that might be, but there was no doubt that it was an awfully long time. His sole opportunity was slipping through his fingers.

He handed his buggy driver the red banknote. The driver's face beamed and he whipped his mare. They raced at breakneck speed to the Alexander Nevsky Monastery. It was growing bitterly cold. Snow began to fall and a stiff wind began to howl.

As they neared the monastery, E.T. had to proceed on foot because the buggy could hardly make its way through the huge throng of mourners. E.T. edged toward the narrow corridor that was obviously intended for the coffin. Yes! There they were! The pallbearers were majestically carrying the great master to his final resting place. There was Dostoevsky, hands folded, in sublime, eternal contemplation of the steep, twisting spirals that his life's journey had followed. E.T. edged his way forward. The crowd gave way reverentially to this barefoot village idiot -- precisely one of those types whom the great master had extolled in his fiction. E.T. minced alongside the coffin as it was slowly and solemnly carried toward the monastery gates. He even scurried around and beneath the coffin, wringing his little hands as he strove desperately to get the master's attention.

"Mr. Dostoevsky, sir! I know you can hear me!... I hope you can hear me... Can you hear me?... Sir, I just wanted to apologize for that fiasco with Marmeladov's nose. Sir, I had nothing to do with that, I assure you. And how his nose found its way into my pocket, I have no idea! Sir, I want you to know that I voted for Yuri Ilyich. I wasn't part of that gang of seven. I'm not responsible for what happened, sir. I tried..."

At this moment the strong arm of the law came to rest on E.T.'s shoulder as a burly policeman tugged him back into the surging crowd. Much later, only after a long struggle, did E.T. make his way forward to where they were preparing to close the coffin. Here it was quiet and E.T. had to speak in a subdued voice, almost in a whisper.

"Mr. Dostoevsky, please believe me! The nose was none of my doing. Really, I voted for Yuri Ilyich!... What more could I do?..."

He was getting no reaction from the dead man. Inconsolable anguish engulfed E.T. as they began to lower the coffin lid.

"Fyodor Mikhailovich," he pleaded, "please take me seriously!... You're not taking me seriously, are you?... Are you, sir?..."

Just then the lid closed. But for one brief moment they raised it again slightly -- just a crack -- in order to close it again

properly. And in that brief moment E.T. could see the master's face through the crack. It smiled mockingly and gave a sly wink. Then it disappeared from view.

E.T. was overwhelmed by panic and horror. His head reeled. He wedged his way through the crowd and into a sidestreet. Only now he noticed the bitter cold. He rubbed his shoulders and huddled in a porchway before proceeding further. Further? Suddenly it dawned on him that he now had nowhere to turn. He stood in the street rubbing his frozen feet against the pantlegs of his pajamas. Then two grimy thugs emerged from the shadows.

"Hey, that's my pajama top!" one exclaimed.

"Yep, that's your pajama top alright!" exclaimed the other.

The two surly figures drew closer. A hairy fist nearly the size of E.T.'s balding head suddenly appeared before his nose. Other heavy hands began tugging at his pajama top.

"No!" E.T. shouted. "Stop! It's my pajama top! The one with the Teddy bears!..."

He twisted and struggled and tried to click his heels together.

"There's no place like home..." he grunted.

But his heels only emitted a barely audible thump. It was hopeless. All was lost. Now he could only hope to save his pajama top. He writhed and screamed as heavy, hairy hands tugged more violently at his pajamas, ripping them at the seams. He fell into the drifting snow, screaming and kicking. The beggar women's alms clinked and rang as they fell from his pajama pockets to the pavement.

"E.T., wake up! Wake up, E.T!" It was Dr. Sanderson shaking E.T. by the shoulders, trying to wake him and tell him about the dramatic events that had transpired in Hogtown that evening.

An account of the dramatic events that transpired in Hogtown that evening follows in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: REMOTE CONTROL

As E.T. was passing through the tollgate in hope of obtaining an interview with Dostoevsky, the annual teaching awards telethon was getting underway at the student-operated TV studio in the basement of the Tower. Along with Spring Commencement and Homecoming, this was one of the most eagerly awaited and festive events on the academic calendar. And this year the suspense and anticipation reached a feverish pitch as wealthy donors kept raising the stakes with cash contributions in the weeks preceding the telethon. Billboards at the college gates and along the walkways provided daily updates of the prize money that was destined for the bank account of the finest teacher in the Magic Kingdom.

The billboards showed a treasure chest with skull and crossbones and overflowing with gleaming gold coins. The amount of the prize money, which was printed on the side of the treasure chest, kept growing day by day until it reached \$2900 on the morning of the awards telethon. The prize was especially coveted by the faculty because it was not simply a one-time bonus, but rather a pay raise that would continue to be received until death or retirement, whichever came first.

When the telethon was first initiated a number of years ago, the college board of directors chose to call the competition "Teaching Investment Plan" in order to reflect their deep commitment to investing in good teaching. However, this acronym was soon scrapped when anonymous complaints began to reach Lombardaki's desk and college administrators suddenly realized that the abbreviation T.I.P. was a bit too crass. They debated the issue with board members for six evenings, arguing that the abbreviation seemed to equate college professors with waiters and taxi drivers. One board member retorted that such an equation is too generous to college professors, and this engendered a lengthy debate concerning not only waiters and taxi drivers, but bellhops, deliverymen, busboys, trained dogs, dancing bears and tour guides as well. Board members defended "Teaching Investment Plan" because it

smacked of Wall Street, capital gains and some sort of enigmatic dividends down the road. But in the end Lombardaki's cautious advice was heeded and, although the award process would remain unchanged, the name was changed to "Annual Teaching Awards," or A.T.A. (as in "Ata boy, Rover!" one board member quipped, but this inside joke remained strictly on the inside).

As the day of the awards telethon drew near, the suspense seemed to grow by the hour. The stakes had never been so high and one could hardly ignore the rumor that the ante would be doubled or even tripled by the time the telethon was over. Each faculty member was making an all-out effort to keep his class enrollments at a maximum and to impress the students with his erudition and concern for the students' comfort, success and general welfare. At times, class sessions even assumed the air of a political campaign, although the pork barrel promises were heavily veiled in subtle allusions to GPA's and final exams and in a superabundance of plusses in daily quiz scores. A few zealous students who, through no fault of their own, had inherited the gene for activism (or the tiny, S-shaped chromosome for groveling) carried posters: "Support Professor Lapowka [accounting] -- He Cares!" and "Give a cheer for Professor Deere [Jack Deere, agronomy]!" A group of German students wore black armbands with the name "Hörnerträger" and goose-stepped jubilantly across campus each afternoon to the Ratskeller bar for Stammtisch and Bruderschaft.

The *Hogtown Gazette* ran daily stories on some of the faculty who were presumed to be frontrunners. Helweena sent her dossier to the newspaper together with her high school graduation photo but was disappointed to see her story appear without the thirty-year-old photo. What was worse, the article was placed alongside a supermarket ad featuring pork tenderloins and cow tongue!

The TV studio accommodated about 150 students, faculty, administrators and patrons of the college. All were hand-picked and received special invitations. A video linkup was made with the football stadium, where most of the students

gathered to cheer and to watch the festivities on the big screen beneath the scoreboard. The telethon was broadcast live, allowing Hogtowners, nearby farmers and most faculty to view the gala event from the comfort of their homes. In previous years, Coldburn had been the master of ceremonies. This year, Woland gracefully declined the opportunity to play that role, pleading that he was camera shy and that he had not yet been initiated into the T.I.P. telethon rites. Emilie Dixon, aging sociologist and staunch supporter of Women's Issues, was chosen to stand in for her comatose colleague.

That evening, I happened to be passing by the stadium when I heard the rumble of the gathered crowd and decided to watch the show. But at the turnstile a tall, skinny fellow in a checkered sport coat offered me a "front-row seat." He winked conspiratorily and motioned me to follow him as he set out in the direction of Goose Slough, not far from the stadium. I was astounded to see that, no matter how fast I pedalled my bike, the gangling stranger somehow managed to keep pace, effortlessly extending his stride as though his long legs were made of latex. In no time at all, we arrived at the palatial home of Dean Coldburn, which resembles a stone castle surrounded on three sides by the moat-like irrigation ditch known to Hogtowners as 'Goose Slough.'

When we entered the castle, I was introduced simply as Gabe to Interim Dean Woland and his colleagues: the shapely Miss Hella, Azazello (a homely fellow with a walleye and a drooping fang) and their enormous tomcat Behemoth, who wore a white apron and was busy baking salmon in the kitchen. My towering guide now introduced himself as Korovyev. I was surprised that he already knew my name because I couldn't recall introducing myself at the stadium. I sensed that I had fallen among very peculiar company and began to suspect that there might be a connection with E.T.'s unusual behavior in recent days. The telethon was about to begin and all sat by the television with margaritas and hors d'oeuvre. Behemoth handed me a margarita and Mr. Korovyev moved the little snack table closer to my armchair. Woland raised his feet onto a hassock and turned to me.

“I understand you’re a writer, Gabe?” he asked.

Again I was surprised that these total strangers had access to information about me. “Well,” I replied, “actually, I’ve only written a few screenplays. Nobody has taken an interest in them yet.”

“Well, then,” Woland replied, “you’ll want to watch today’s show very closely. But change genres, Gabe. Change genres...” He winked.

Just then, Emilie Dixon came onto the TV screen and introduced two jugglers. An elated cheer rang out as cameras panned the audience both in the studio and at the stadium. The jugglers were blessed with a truly unusual talent as they managed to keep six pins spinning through the air between them while each manipulated three more pins in his hands. The astonishing act elicited jubilant hurrah’s from students and faculty -- and even from administrators, who, it was commonly believed, had seen just about everything there is to see and a little extra during their all-expense-paid junkets to other colleges and continents.

The juggling act was followed by a medley of local business owners and leaders of student organizations who presented huge cardboard checks representing contributions that ranged from eighty-eight cents (Harry’s 88-Cent Store) to three hundred dollars (Alpha Omega Sorority). Each business owner spoke warmly of “Wilbur’s kids” and vowed to make a larger contribution next year, expressing an earnest desire to continue serving the college community. Some alluded to the slow economy in apologizing for their meager contributions, but all expressed their solidarity in lending support to the highest goals and standards in the education of the nation’s youth. This desire was aptly summed up by Henry Barfield (Barfield’s Diner -- \$36.90):

“Excellence in education has brought Hogtown where it is today, and it will probably take Hogtown where it will be tomorrow. Statistics show that quality teaching is inevitably followed by quality learning. I only run a diner and I have not seen these statistics, but other people have seen them, and they assure me that this is the case. By the way, on Fridays we have a special on ribs -- all you can eat for only \$3.69.”

After the presentation of checks, Dr. Dixon announced that the prize money now totalled over \$3700. The camera at the stadium zoomed in on the scoreboard, which flashed the figure \$3791.88.

"It's all for Wilbur's kids," Dr. Dixon explained. "Let's bring out some of Wilbur's kids!"

College students in wheelchairs began to emerge from behind the gold curtain. Each wheelchair was pushed by a professor in cap and gown. The students appeared to be quite meaty and perfectly healthy. From their wheelchairs they waved and gesticulated to their friends in the studio audience. When Dr. Dixon invoked the audience, "Let's hear it for Wilbur's kids!" -- the roar at the stadium was tremendous. Two of "Wilbur's kids" leaped from their wheelchairs in order to crank up the enthusiasm with a rotating fist. Finally the cheering abated and an intimate videotape documentary about the college began, narrated by Wilbur Coldburn:

"Here at the Magic Kingdom, our primary commitment is to excellence in teaching. Hogtown provides an ideal learning environment with its peaceful, small-town atmosphere and its picturesque setting among lakes, rivers and abundant wildlife."

As Coldburn spoke, the video showed the Tower, the college lawn and the statue of Jefferson Davies, self-educated benefactor of the college. Then followed views of the Hogtown Bank, the Greyhound bus depot as the daily bus arrives, and the gazebo in the park with the old locomotive for children to play on. The viewer then found himself on the banks of Hog Creek and among the endless bullrushes alongside the South Marsh before suddenly being transported to Harry Tanner's farm, where diligent hogs sidle up to a long trough as red hens peck busily at the muddy ground.

"Here at the Magic Kingdom," Coldburn's voice continued, "our faculty make every effort to ensure that learning is a painless operation. The notion that pain is an inevitable ingredient in learning is an outmoded idea that we categorically reject. We strive to apply the most modern theories of human learning and development in order to eliminate all tension from the learning process. There must be no pain, no tension. Of

course, students have individual needs. Not all students learn at the same rate. Teaching must be tolerant and forgiving. It is the responsibility of the teacher to devise methods of learning that will work for each individual student. And above all, a good teacher will always bear in mind that not all students are blessed with the ability to master each particular subject area. Talents are not distributed evenly. Here at the Magic Kingdom, we believe in positive reinforcement. Grades should serve as a positive reward, not as a punishment for failure. Strictly speaking, students do not fail to learn, although teachers sometimes fail in their task -- which is to instill knowledge and to inspire. Through progressive, innovative programs such as the Annual Teaching Awards we instill in our faculty a deep-seated respect for the opinions, desires and limitations of each individual student. We believe that all students are born equal, and -- if they pay their tuition in a timely fashion -- it is our goal to safeguard that equality by every means possible.”

As Coldburn narrated, the video illustrated the faculty’s extreme respect and care for the students with scenes from the classroom: a professor holds the door open politely as a dozen happy students file into the classroom; a professor patiently gives sophomore Mary Lou Walcott four chances to identify Madagascar on a map of the world and smiles with heartfelt encouragement as her hesitant finger finally begins to drift down the east coast of Africa. Coldburn’s voice continues: “Top students from throughout our fine nation flock to the Magic Kingdom, where learning never ends.” Meanwhile, the video shows a student who burns his fingers again and again as he stubbornly tries to adjust an electrical gadget in an engineering lab. Then the focus shifts to the Student Counseling Center, where rows of students lie on therapeutic couches with sunglasses and earphones. In another room, a female counselor reads from a textbook to a reclining student and periodically checks his pulse.

Finally, Coldburn’s narration came to a conclusion: “Here at the Magic Kingdom, we hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that all citizens have an equal right to a college education. If they’ve paid their fee, they deserve their degree. No pain is everyone’s gain. At long

last, democracy has truly come to education. The student now has the final word. Tonight, students, you have the opportunity once again to exercise your right to shape the future of our institution by choosing and rewarding the finest professor in the Magic Kingdom. Exercise your rights freely but responsibly, bearing in mind that you are now adults and your parents, at least, are taxpayers, even if you yourself pay no taxes. Exercise your rights with the objectivity and maturity that is expected of adults. And may the best man (or woman) win!”

An enthusiastic roar ensued at the stadium. The video was perfectly timed, taxing students’ patience precisely to the limit and no more. Another minute or two of Coldburn’s sagacious vituperation -- and scattered catcalls would have crescendoed like the impassioned roar of forty lions demanding to be released from their circus cages and allowed to return to the boundless grasslands of the African savannah. The video ended just in time to capture not only the enthusiastic applause of the patiently listening minority, but also the pent-up energies of the tuned-out majority, who exploded into wild cheers not so much because of the content of Coldburn’s speech, but rather because of its termination.

The camera now focussed on the rapturous smile of Emilie Dixon at center stage: “Oh, isn’t it wonderful,” she exclaimed, “to hear Dr. Coldburn’s voice? How I do wish he could be with us here tonight instead of in that... in that...”

Azazello pressed his remote control and suddenly a nasal voice echoed through the TV studio: “In that morgue, Miss Dixon?”

Dr. Dixon’s startled eyes nearly popped out of their sockets. “No, I meant: in that coma.”

“Well, then,” the nasal voice resounded overhead, “please continue, Miss Dixon! Let’s get this show on the road!”

The students laughed and cheered the mysterious voice, taking it for part of the program script. The students in wheelchairs led the cheering. One even stood up and did a backflip before gleefully plopping back down into his wheelchair.

“Well, then,” Dr. Dixon continued, “without further ceremony let’s begin the polling.” A golden curtain opened behind the elderly Dixon, revealing three tiers of students manning telephones, which were already ringing. A phone number appeared at the bottom of the television screen. “I think you all know the rules. First, nominations will be taken by these young volunteers at the telephones. Nominations will be counted, and the top ten nominees will be our finalists. Then the decision will be left in the hands of the student body. Finally, the results of the polling of the student body are factored into a brilliant formula derived by the dean’s office with the indispensable assistance of the Department of Mathematics. Let’s hear it for the math department!”

A modest cheer went up in honor of the math department.

“As you know, this formula gives prime consideration to the number of student contact hours for each faculty member. Quality multiplied by quantity -- that means teaching excellence at the Magic Kingdom and... big bucks for the lucky excellent man or woman who is chosen. So let’s begin the testimonials!”

Students from all corners of the studio leaped to their feet and queued up to give verbal support to their favorite professors. Placards were raised and candidates’ names were chanted by competing groups of student supporters. The jubilant chanting was duplicated at the stadium, only on a far grander scale. There, the scene resembled both a football game and a political convention. Each fraternity and sorority seemed to have its own candidate. Festive black and blue streamers sailed overhead. Yellow and orange strobe lights whisked across the faces of the gathered masses. Each contingent tried to register the strongest reading on the noise meter beside the scoreboard. Horns and noisemakers blasted chaotically in the stands. Long lines formed at the public telephones by the concession stand.

Finally, a list of nominations began to appear on the TV screen over the heads of the volunteer telephone operators from Alpha Omega. There were clearly some frontrunners, as shown both by the number of phone calls in favor of those

professors and by the volume of applause for each candidate. The favorites appeared to be professors in history, English, math -- and E.T. Poogh.

Suddenly, without warning, the stadium exploded in thunderous jubilation as the figure on the scoreboard leaped to \$5000.88. The scoreboard blinked on and off, and fireworks lit up the twilight sky with an orange, black and blue plume. The inspired multitudes were warmed up and ready to get down to business.

When the cheering abated, students in the TV studio began their testimonials on behalf of their favorite candidates as the crowd at the stadium watched on the big screen. A cheer resounded after each testimonial, boosting the arrow on the noise meter as high as 6.5. However, the real noise began after testimonials for Dr. Pyrrhus, professor of history. The noise meter climbed to 8.3 for Professor Pyrrhus, but his victory proved short-lived when the meter rose to 9.0 for Dr. Sharon Thickery, professor of English. Judging by shrieks and squeals on her behalf and by the generally high pitch of Dr. Thickery's vocal following, many of her supporters appeared to be of the female gender. But this is all in the nature of things and, besides, not all of them were female. She was praised lavishly for being a role model and an inspiration to young women.

It seemed that Dr. Thickery would likely go home with the laurels (and the big bucks), but, surprisingly, Dr. Godfry Root, professor of mathematics, scored a 9.4 on the noise meter after Liz Hubbard's exceptionally touching testimonial about how he had personally manipulated her slide rule when at exam time she was too exhausted from studying to operate her slide rule alone.

Soon thereafter, E.T. received a 9.2 after a student bore witness to Dr. Poogh's intensely humane values and his skill in making the great Russian masters relevant to the students' lives. The emotional, heartwarming stories continued until the noise meter standings were: Pyrrhus 8.9, Thickery 9.2, Poogh 9.2, Root 9.4. But when an unusually grateful student argued passionately that Dr. Poogh should be honored for his flexibility, tolerance and respect for the individual in allowing each student to develop at his or her own pace -- and in

equipping all his exams with questions of the type: “how is this novel relevant to your life?” -- E.T. suddenly received a meter reading of 9.9! It was like a bolt out of the blue. Nobody had expected E.T. to fare so well. A 9.9 was unheard of in the history of the competition. It broke the former record by three-tenths of a point. Many suspected synchronous noisemakers or other foul play, but these claims proved groundless. The competition was now in its homestretch as the scoreboard clock showed only a minute remaining. It seemed certain that nobody could now overtake E.T., but the crowd’s fervor continued unabated, stoked by the excitement of an approaching denouement.

It was at this moment that Woland aimed his remote control at the TV and said, “You know, Hella, I’m not sure I understand what these students mean. Let’s see if we can get a clearer idea...”

Immediately the second hand on the scoreboard clock fell limpidly and struggled to climb, but kept falling again and again. Abigail Williams, one of the young coeds who had praised Dr. Root so highly, now pushed her way to the front of the testimonial line once again and jerked the microphone out of another student’s hands.

“What I meant was: Dr. Root lets us know the test questions ahead of time. He’s no sadist. He’s no Marmeladov! He doesn’t savour prolonged suffering or human tragedy. He wants to see us get our degree and get the hell out of here -- the same thing we want!”

Woland clicked his remote control once again and commented, “Ah, now I see what she meant!”

“God, I can’t believe I just said that!” Abigail exclaimed as she surrendered the microphone and retreated in embarrassment, moving in fast motion as though someone had accelerated a video tape.

The second hand on the scoreboard clock began to climb smoothly again, but then fell when Azazello clicked his remote control. The student who had praised E.T. so highly, eliciting a response measuring 9.9, now inserted her round face within a few inches of the camera. Rapidly chewing her bubblegum, she shouted: “You can skip most of the classes and just show up

for the exams, and you can count on a B or a C. I mean, you can't skip them all 'cause there have to be classes, you know what I mean? I mean, somebody has to go some of the time. It takes teamwork. I mean, without classes there would be no college and we wouldn't get degrees."

The zealous coed blew a large bubble that burst as it touched the lens of the TV camera. Then her face disappeared from view. The rest of the broadcast from the TV studio was seen by viewers through a hazy film of pink chewing gum. Azazello clicked his remote control, and a shriek could be heard off camera.

Dr. Dixon emerged from backstage and announced that time had expired despite the technical problem with the scoreboard clock. It was time for the judges backstage to tabulate the final results. The supporters of Dr. Poogh were jubilant. Victory seemed to be in their grasp.

Azazello clicked his remote control, and Dr. Dixon continued through clenched teeth: "What the hell is going on around here? Who are the bastards that are toying around with the show?!"

Another click of Azazello's remote, and Emilie Dixon flushed from embarrassment. She covered her pink face with her hands so that only the white bun on her aged head was visible as she fled backstage. The gold curtain was lowered, concealing the volunteer telephone operators from Alpha Omega, and the jugglers emerged once again, greeted by fervent applause in the studio. This time they juggled with flaming torches which they passed high over the heads of "Wilbur's kids," who gawked uneasily as the twirling flames flew up beneath the scaffolding. But then Korovyev reached out with his remote control, and the flaming torches turned into flaming numbers, as though by magic! The elated audience broke into wild applause both in the studio and at the stadium. Fiery 1's, 3's and 7's criss-crossed through the air from juggler to juggler. The applause crescendoed as the flaming numbers suddenly began to multiply! 5's and 9's and a whole stream of 6's sailed back and forth with such frequency that the jugglers could barely cope. Sweat streamed down their Gypsy-like faces and at times they seemed to burn their deft fingers on the

awkward flying figures. But the numbers continued to multiply and began to fall on the heads of Wilbur's kids and their faculty escorts. The tassel on one old codger's cap caught fire and fiery numbers continued to rain down as Wilbur's kids chuckled and struggled to stamp out the flames. A rope on the scaffolding high overhead began to glow like a cigar just as Dr. Mai Dong of the Mathematics Department emerged to announce the judges' decision.

"Radius and gentrymen! I have great pressure to announce plies. Five thousand dolluh goes to Godfly Loot!"

Dr. Root's supporters, inebriated by sweet victory, leaped from their seats and waved their fists as they cheered wildly for their candidate. At the stadium, a small fight broke out between the boys of Pi Ro Mania Fraternity (supporters of Godfry Root) and Beta Bundle, who supported Professor Poogh and felt that their candidate had been robbed of victory. The little fight escalated into a gentle shoving match which pinned several dozen sorority sisters against the lower retaining wall. They squirmed in helpless agony, gasping for air and possibly reflecting philosophically on the greater message that descends upon mankind from a wondrous, higher realm: namely, that although the students were now enfranchised and democracy had come to education, the administrators still called the shots. Fireworks boomed above the stadium, lighting up the night sky. Meanwhile, back at the studio, Dr. Dong phoned Professor Root in order to gauge his reaction:

"Godfly Loot, are you happy to win erection?"

Azazello clicked his remote control as Dr. Root replied:

"Why, yes, I am, Dr. Dong. Gladys is always asking for a little more. I mean, it's a material world, after all. We can't live on communion wafers, you know. If the taxpayers want more excellent teachers like myself, by God, they're gonna have to fork out for it! No more of that two percent crap. If you want a good electric hedge trimmer, you've got to pay good money for it. You can't go looking in any bargain basement. You pay for quality. It's the same with excellent teachers like myself. You've got to dangle that carrot out there or they won't rise to the occasion. No carrots -- no excellence -- no Roots!"

Next, there followed brief congratulations from other faculty members in the TV studio. First to speak was Hörnerträger:

“On behalf of the Modern Languages Department I would like to congratulate Professor Root and the Math Department with this well-deserved honor. This year’s narrow defeat will serve as an inspiration for our department to do better next year. We shall make every effort to bolster the size of our undergraduate classes and to go that extra kilometer to ensure that students’ desires and expectations are gratified...”

Suddenly Azazello reached straight into the TV screen, grabbed Hörnerträger by the lapels and jerked his head and shoulders into the room where we sat with Woland. “And Dostoevsky?!” Azazello demanded in a nasal voice that reverberated throughout the TV studio as well as in Coldburn’s castle. “Will Dostoevsky be gratified?” Azazello shook Hörnerträger violently. “What about Dostoevsky, eh? What about the frontiers of science? The cutting edge?” Azazello slapped Hörnerträger across the cheeks six times in rapid succession. Korovyev reached over Hörnerträger’s head with an open razor that glowed like lightning. Hörnerträger panicked and tried to grab the handle, but caught the blade instead. Blood spurted from his palm. His mouth wrenched open from pain, and a huge lighted firecracker resembling a stick of dynamite was suddenly lodged between his teeth, God knows where from. Spectators were nonplussed. Throughout the struggle, they could hear the nasal voice and see Hörnerträger’s legs and midsection, but his head and shoulders had disappeared straight into the TV camera. Then, as thunder rumbled overhead, Hörnerträger felt a numbing blow to his equine chin (Azazello’s iron fist) and tumbled onto his behind in the TV studio. The firecracker exploded between Hörnerträger’s teeth, knocking him senseless and blackening his confused face.

Professor of Religion Sam Parris, who delivers the invocation at all college functions but arrived late for the telethon, rushed out onto the stage, hoping to stop the violence through the power of prayer. “We pray and entreat and beseech Thee, O Lord, that Satan, the devil, the roaring lion, the old

dragon, the enemy of all righteousness, may no longer be served by us, by our envy and strifes, but that all from this day forward may be covered with the mantle of love, and we may on all hands forgive each other heartily, sincerely and thoroughly, as we do hope and pray that Thou would forgive..." But at this moment, a long, hooked pole emerged from backstage and neatly yanked Dr. Parris stage left, from whence he came.

By now, the flaming numbers in the studio multiplied beyond anyone's control. The jugglers dutifully struggled to handle them, but they licked their fingers more and more often and finally fled from the scene as the fiery numbers continued to rain down -- God knows how. As the jugglers fled, Emilie Dixon came out before the camera sporting a beatific smile, oblivious of the fiery storm that was raining down around her. With hands folded reverentially, she announced in a voice that was full of rapture:

"Ladies and gentlemen, we have a most pleasant and most unexpected surprise! Dean Coldburn has blessed us with a visit to the studio. He has risen again, so to speak, in order to congratulate Dr. Root and the real winners of the competition - - Wilbur's kids!"

The awestruck audience in the studio and the multitudes at the stadium suspended their rancor and feuding in order to give Coldburn a standing ovation as he emerged from backstage. His arrival was marked by a certain stiffness of gait. There was a reluctance in the movements of his legs, arms and neck, but perhaps this was quite natural in a man whose circuits had recently been soldered and welded by 700,000 volts. The dean's arrival was seen as a miracle. The man had returned from death to walk the floors of the Tower, however haltingly, once again. This, at least, was what passed through the minds of the applauding audience in the studio and at the stadium, where Wilbur Coldburn's advent was viewed on the big screen.

But from their vantage point on stage, Wilbur's kids and their faculty escorts could make out tiny details that escaped the attention of those who viewed at a distance. Even as with great zeal they stomped out their escorts' burning caps and

gowns, Wilbur's kids could discern scars resembling zippers across Coldburn's neck and forehead. They also noticed what appeared to be a small rubber stopper protruding from each side of the dean's neck. And they could sense a mortal heaviness of gait, a dullness in the eyes and a slight twitching of the upper lip which revealed a yellow canine tooth that seemed to yearn for... the devil only knows what for! His collar and tie appeared to be double-starched.

In brief, those who saw him up close could see that the dean hadn't fully risen from the dead after all. As he shuffled stiffly toward them, Wilbur's kids abandoned their struggle with the stubborn flames that refused to be extinguished. A coed screamed and raced away, pushing her wheelchair as she fled. The panic spread to the other Wilbur's kids and their escorts, who soon fled in all directions, leaving their wheelchairs behind them. Dean Coldburn continued to shuffle forward toward the camera.

"I am very pleased," he began in a rasping, otherworldly voice. But precisely at this moment the ropes on the scaffolding overhead were eaten through by flames and the scaffolding with heavy overhead lights came crashing down to the floor. At first there was only a cloud of smoke, dust and splinters, but then the scaffolding, the gold curtain and the entire stage were engulfed in flame. Coldburn continued to stand there inertly, unmoved by the flames that licked his pantlegs without effect.

"My kids!" he rasped. "Where are my kids?"

He groped among the flames, seemingly confused and lost. The audience was evacuating the studio. Sirens could be heard in the distance. Coldburn peered into the TV camera at point-blank range and the camera suddenly shattered, probably from the heat of the conflagration. The crowd at the stadium saw the dean's scarface fill the enormous screen for a brief moment before vaporizing into a yellow desert of hot, glowing sand.

Half the student body, eager to witness the fire at the TV studio, rushed to the stadium exits in order to join the footrace to the Tower. Lightning flashed two or three times, illuminating a black cloud of smoke which billowed up from the Tower's lower stories. Curiously, however, those who had

been so eager to flee from the burning building stopped in their tracks at the exits and now stood gesticulating in the windows and doorways of the first two stories. As the lightning flashed, one could make out among the shadows the reason for their hesitation. The entire lawn roundabout the Tower was crawling with reptiles. Gators had surrounded the huge edifice and were now attacking the doorways, snapping their enormous jaws and lashing out with their tails. Screams could be heard from the first floor and one could make out the silhouettes of people running from room to room. Evidently some alligators were already inside -- bull gators.

Why it happened -- God only knows. Possibly atmospheric conditions, working together with some sort of genetic trigger, caused the gators to converge upon their primordial nesting place. Or perhaps there was some other reason. At any rate, the spawn that year had been enormous and it was an awful sight to behold: thousands of baby alligators, mama gators and gruesomely large bull gators crawling this way and that, snapping at the lightning and at one another, each trying to edge closer to the Tower. More gators kept coming from the marshes roundabout town. Sporadic shouts and screams from all directions indicated new sightings at dangerously close distances.

Meanwhile, the fire trucks finally arrived, weaving their way to within forty yards of the Tower before coming up against a solid carpet of writhing reptiles. The gators tore randomly at the fire hoses, forcing the trucks to retreat another ten yards. By now, flames had crept their way from the basement TV studio to the fourth floor at the south end of the Tower. The firemen hooked a hose up to the hydrant by Grimm Hall, but there was no water when they cranked the valve. A pumper truck moved in and attempted to reach the Tower from about thirty-five yards, but at that distance the light sprinkle had no real effect on the fire.

The TV crew arrived from the stadium and resumed their broadcast. Police scurried about beneath the lightning, brandishing their pistols and keeping the exhilarated student body away from the area. Shortly before the fire, a vagrant known as Slick had been seen lurking outside the studio and

pouring some sort of liquid near the base of the Tower. All of Hogtown had seen Slick at one time or another when he passed through town. He usually hung around the post office and offered to lick ladies' stamps for only a nickel. An all-points police bulletin went out for his arrest. Sages and prophets now spoke up:

"I knew they should have put him away long ago."

"They should have known! You could see the guy wasn't normal..."

Finally the rain came. It was a heavy deluge, the kind of tropical downpour we're used to in the South. That night, we were right in the center of the storm. Lightning kept crackling overhead and the thunder was deafening. The policemen were immediately drenched. Their shirts seemed glued to their obese torsos and their badges danced and flashed beneath the lightning. The firemen retreated to their trucks and donned their heavy coats. However, the fire raged higher and higher inside the building, untouched by the downpour outside. The police aimed their guns at the alligators and fired a few dozen rounds in quick succession, but this only angered the beasts, who turned on them and charged, forcing Hogtown's finest to beat a hasty retreat.

When two more pumper trucks arrived from neighboring regions, it was decided to aim all three hoses at the gators in order to try to open a pathway to the poor souls who were stranded in the Tower. The firemen lined up and turned on their hoses. A dozen brave men armed with axes and fire extinguishers followed closely on their heels as the hosemen advanced. The stalwart hosemen inched their way forward, hewing a pathway through the angry gators. Twelve brave men followed, holding the reptiles at bay with the nasty white chemicals from their fire extinguishers. Plowed and churned by thousands of heavy alligator bellies, the lawn was now a slippery ooze. In some places the muddy water was knee-deep and the going was rough. The big danger was that the gators might sever the hoses behind the firemen as they proceeded. Ladders were used to cover the hoses part of the way, but the hoses remained exposed nonetheless.

Ambulances and hearses were now arriving, ready to evacuate the unfortunate victims. When the firemen reached the central doorway, they couldn't manage to dislodge six or seven bull gators who stubbornly barred the way, indifferent to the high-pressure streams of water that glanced off their primordial foreheads. The firemen learned that it was most effective to zap them in the eyes and in the mouth when they opened their gaping maws. In this way they managed to hold them at bay while they raised a ladder to the porch roof over the entryway.

Soon those trapped inside were assembled on the roof. Escorted by a dozen brave men and three stalwart chaps with hoses, they slowly made their way through the pouring rain and rising waters to the waiting ambulances. It was like the crossing of the Red Sea, only the water was nastier and there was no Moses or Charlton Heston to ensure success. In the distance, spectators cheered. But the torrential rain continued and the fire in the Tower raged on.

The victims' injuries were mostly minor, but all were rushed off to the hospital for observation. Emilie Dixon was among those whose lives had just been saved. As paramedics lifted her into the ambulance, she suddenly recalled: "Dean Coldburn!" She screamed hysterically: "Dean Coldburn is still in there! Oh, my God!"

The alligators had now thoroughly sealed off the Red Sea crossing, and there were now many more of them. Even the bravest of men would not have dared to cross that seething swamp a second time. Flames were dancing in nearly every window of the Tower. Bull gators swaggered out onto the balconies and gnawed at the railings. Suddenly, in the main entry, Coldburn appeared. Lightning flashed as the TV camera zoomed in on Wilbur's diffident scarface, capturing on video a morbid melancholy that was imprinted upon his brow and reflected in his matte, unseeing eyes.

Now comes what is perhaps the most miraculous moment in my chronicle of the disaster. As I watched on TV, I couldn't believe my eyes, although Woland and his colleagues were having a hearty chuckle as everything happened. The fact is that the gators actually bowed their heads as Dean Coldburn

passed, allowing him to step from head to head and cross the churning swamp water without even getting his feet wet! The alligators never even snapped at him -- not once! -- as though he were one of their brood, blood of their blood and flesh of their flesh. Everyone stood dead in their tracks and gazed with disbelief as Coldburn stepped rather stiffly but coolly across the seething gator pit and climbed into the waiting hearse.

“To the morgue,” he rasped without emotion.

Seeing this through the ambulance window, Dr. Dixon immediately fainted. Her ambulance raced away to the hospital, slipping and sliding through the thick mud by Grimm Hall. Coldburn’s hearse had better traction and sailed peacefully and funereally through the deepening ooze toward Cornbin Street.

Everyone expected the torrential rain to let up, but instead of letting up it actually redoubled its fury. The lightning struck nearby trees two or three times. The rain lashed the ground with a frenzy, churning the swampy waters that now forced the fire trucks to retreat even further from the Tower. The firemen could only sit in the cabs of their trucks and watch as the flames slowly engulfed the whole Tower.

Then, all of a sudden, the ground shifted underfoot. The floodwaters acquired an undertow and began flowing into the basement of the Tower. The police and firemen backed their vehicles away once more and forced the TV crew to work from a safer distance. There was an eerie screeching and groaning as the Tower careened slightly to one side. The muddy ground began to slip away. Drivers panicked and spun their wheels trying to back up too fast. A police car collided with a fire truck. An enormous sucking sound accompanied a deep underground rumble as the Tower began to sink.

“A sinkhole!” exclaimed one policeman. His conclusion was soon echoed from all directions as the third and fourth floors slowly disappeared beneath the seething ooze.

“Sinkhole my ass!...” the fire chief mumbled into his walkie-talkie.

Alligators slithered from the Tower balconies into the churning swamp, but most were immediately caught in the undertow and could only thrash about helplessly as they were sucked down by a force which they had never before encoun-

tered. The flames hissed and the clouds of smoke and steam engulfed the Tower as it slowly descended deeper into the abyss. It sank like a ship at sea when captain and crew have launched their lifeboats and even the rats in the galley scurry up the masts and rigging and sniff the stormy air as the ship careens to one side, groaning and creaking as it descends slowly and inexorably to a dark, watery grave. The TV camera recorded the event splendidly, zooming in as the top of the Tower sank into the steaming, gurgling mud. For a brief moment it seemed to pause in its descent, whipped by the unrelenting rain and illuminated by the lightning which raged all around. A bull gator, erstwhile king of the mountain, slipped from his throne atop the Tower platform only to be swallowed immediately by the deadly undertow. A blue fork of lightning struck the pennant that was mounted on the platform, incinerating the cloth just before it sank entirely from view. The huge mudhole belched and gurgled as the flagship of the South continued to sink deeper and deeper into the bowels of the earth. There were occasional violent eruptions, as though from underground explosions, which sent mud and limp, black alligator carcasses flying high into the night sky. The rain abated somewhat but continued to lash the ground as lightning skipped and danced across the sky. Beneath luminescent clouds, the swamp bubbled and glowed with an eerie phosphorescence where the highest edifice in Hogtown had stood.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: HUNKER DOWN

A small tree limb had crashed through the roof of Dr. Sanderson's house at the storm's outset, and he had missed much of the TV broadcast while placing pots and pans on the attic floor to catch the streams of rainwater. But he managed to witness the manhandling of Hörnerträger and the destruction of the Tower. As he stood by the TV gazing with disbelief at the surging quagmire, each successive lightning flash seemed to forge another link in the chain of associations that proceeded from the televised catastrophe: Hörnerträger -- flash, crackle, boom! -- Dostoevsky -- zap, rumble, crash! -- Marmeladov -- flash, crackle, bam! -- the sinking Tower -- flash, boom! -- E.T. Yes, E.T. had warned them! Now all of Hogtown was truly in danger, just as E.T. had predicted. But what should he do? Where should he turn? E.T. would know what to do!

Dr. Sanderson reached down to turn off his TV, but suddenly a huge black cat's paw emerged from the screen and pinned his hand to the control panel. Lightning flashed, the picture tube blew, and a tomcat screamed hoarsely as the paw retreated back inside the TV set. Dr. Sanderson licked his bleeding hand as he ran outside into the raging torrent. With a running start he leaped onto his bike, slipped and fell in the mud, rose and mounted the bike in a more sober fashion, and then pedalled away in the direction of E.T.'s house. The road took him straight by Hörnerträger's house, where the urgency of the crisis led him to act more brazenly than he would dare to act in peacetime. He dropped his bicycle by the towering porch, ran up the steps and rang the doorbell -- unannounced! There was no answer. He rang again. Again no answer. Of course! Hörnerträger must be at the hospital with his bleeding hand. But maybe there was still time to warn Helweena! He tried the doorknob -- the door was unlocked. He ran inside and called out, "Helweena!" His voice echoed beneath the high vaulted ceilings, but there was no reply. A large bowl of red plums gleamed on the dining room table. The moose head over the fireplace seemed to gaze with suspicion at the nocturnal in-

truder. Hörnerträger's flute lay mute and abandoned on the mantle.

I should add here that Hörnerträger takes great pride in his ability to play the flute. Twice each semester Helweena organizes a festive get-together at their palatial home, where Hörnerträger modestly sits down beside the glowing fireplace and plays a few classical tunes for his colleagues. They listen reverentially and later join in for a jam session. Stableboy stands beside Hörnerträger and jangles his tambourine while Henryk Ikota capers about the room clicking his Spanish castanets. E.T. thumps on a toy tom-tom that is decorated with brightly colored feathers and buffalo heads. Frau Frau slips on her soft kidskin gloves, dims the lights and glides among the tapestries surreally, attempting to recreate the dance movements of Isadora Duncan. Helweena serves wine and joins Will Sully in beating out a subtle accompaniment on kitchen pans of various dimensions. The tiger-striped housecat gazes with wide-open eyes from the Turkish armchair and then retreats into the shadows behind the tall potted palms. The scholarly discussions become very long-winded and technical as the evening progresses and the colleagues proceed from pay raises to enrollments and then to travel grants and ways of reducing one's teaching load. When the topic turns to the "network" (that is, precisely who has the most clout on the various academic grant committees and how these crucial scholars can be influenced), Hörnerträger finds himself on the horns of a dilemma and becomes more reticent, preoccupied with the smooth operation of the keys on his flute. After all, science, like alchemy, has its closely guarded mysteries. Why should one share with the uninitiated those secrets of the universe that were gained through long years of painstaking labor in the laboratory? Later in the evening, the celebrants usually retreat to the back yard (the "hinterland," as Helmut affectionately calls it) for croquet, barbecued ribs and more musical interludes beneath the ancient oaks. Will Sully is stoked to a fiery incandescence when Helweena emerges onto

the deck in her black and orange swimsuit and invites everyone for a dip in the jacuzzi. Hörnerträger lights the mosquito-repellant torches and all sip wine by the jacuzzi as Helweena demonstrates the facile obedience of her four-foot-long pet boa, which gently and supply entwines himself around her arms and torso.

Now Dr. Sanderson ran from room to room in search of Hörnerträger's better half, but she was nowhere to be found. He decided to give up the search and began making his way back through the palatial maze when suddenly he heard giggling from the canopied deck outside. The jacuzzi! She was in the jacuzzi! Dr. Sanderson raced out onto the redwood deck, exclaiming: "Helweena! Helweena! We're catching it because of Marmeladov! The Tower has disappeared! It's sunk! Gone to hell!"

Helweena emitted a little squeal. Only then did Dr. Sanderson notice that the chairman's better half was not alone in the jacuzzi. She was sitting in the lap of her star student, Buckie Sly, for whom she later wrote that splendid letter of recommendation for his application to grad school. They were skimpily clad in the garb worn by Adam and Eve, but Buckie modestly covered the tiny breasts of Hörnerträger's better half with his big, horny hands. A violin sonata quietly played on a portable radio.

"Maybe E.T. will know what to do," Dr. Sanderson continued, out of breath. "Helmut was on the cutting edge. They took him to the hospital, I think. It's because of Dostoevsky. Maybe if you find Woland and apologize for Yuri Ilyich... Maybe it will all end... Maybe Hogtown will be spared..."

Helweena overcame her temporary state of shock and hissed through gritted teeth: "You stinking little peeping Tom! The nerve -- to come barging into other people's homes! Get the hell out of here!"

She flung her bottle of body oil and it shattered at Dr. Sanderson's feet. He fled, slipping and sliding on the hardwood floors, as curses echoed in his wake: "The little bastard!"

No respect for anyone's privacy! I'll see that that little pervert never gets a raise again!..."

Outside, Dr. Sanderson mounted his bicycle and set out once again through the driving rain toward E.T.'s house. Finding the door unlocked, he ran straight inside to E.T.'s bedroom and found his colleague in a fetal position nestled beneath the covers.

"E.T., wake up!" he pleaded, tugging at his colleague's pajama top. "E.T., it's begun! The Tower just disappeared! E.T., wake up!"

E.T. struggled, clutching at his pajama top, kicking and writhing as though in pain.

"E.T., wake up! "

E.T. woke up and squinted at Dr. Sanderson with a horror-ridden face. He covered his head with his blanket and peered out like a war-weary soldier peers from his bunker at the hot desert sky. As lightning flashed in the distance, E.T. could see that his colleague was soaking wet.

"E.T., you were right. They've started to tear the place to smithereens. The Tower just went to hell -- burned and sank in a quagmire. Hörnerträger caught it good for Marmeladov. They roughed him up pretty good, not as bad as Puzaty, but they showed him the cutting edge and his left hand got slashed pretty bad. The lightning's doing a lot of damage. There might be no end to it, E.T...."

E.T.'s eyes were now wide open. He cringed as lightning flashed over the house, followed immediately by a loud explosion of thunder.

"...Maybe we should head out of town?..." Dr. Sanderson suggested.

"It's too late," E.T. replied in his hoarse, gnomish voice. "Dostoevsky, Marmeladov... Running won't help..."

"I tried to get Helweena to go to Woland and show some contrition, but she doesn't seem to be aware that Rome is burning. E.T., maybe we should go to Woland and apologize?..."

Thunder exploded so loud overhead that both colleagues ducked their heads.

“Hans, have you ever read the passage in the Bible? The one that goes: ‘And they were all gathered there to be judged, the living and the dead. And two of the living stepped forward before Elijah and the Archangel Michael and said, “We apologize, sir, for what we have done.” And lo, Elijah and the Archangel Michael patted the two who apologized on the head and said unto them, “You may go to heaven. Bear right as you pass through the gates and sin no more.” And the two who apologized passed through the gates of heaven and lived happily ever after.’ Do you remember that passage, Hans?”

“No...”

“That’s because there is no such passage, Hans.”

“Look, what is there for us to apologize for, anyway? We supported Marmeladov. It’s Helweena and Hörnerträger who trashed him.”

“And Dostoevsky?”

“??”

“What about Dostoevsky, Hans? Did we support him?”

“Look, E.T., I’m not a Russian specialist...”

“But you’re in Yuri Ilyich’s department.”

“Yes, but my responsibilities end somewhere.”

“But where do they begin and continue?”

“Well, to begin with, I can’t read Russian...”

“Cat got your tongue? You can’t ask questions?”

“Hey, who are you to talk? You can read Russian, but... did you read Marmeladov’s work?”

“... That’s my point exactly.”

Their eyes met as Dr. Sanderson pondered E.T.’s gloomy reasoning in silence. Thunder rumbled in the distance, followed by a bright flash and a deafening explosion outside E.T.’s window. An old oak tree crashed to the ground, whisking the wall outside and shattering the window. Dr. Sanderson leaped onto the bed in fright. After regaining his senses, he asked, “So, what do you think we should do?”

“There’s only one thing we can do,” E.T. replied quietly. “Hunker down.”

Thunder rumbled overhead once again.

“May I?...” Dr. Sanderson asked timidly. E.T. lifted his blanket and Dr. Sanderson, dripping wet from the deluge,

crawled into E.T.'s refuge. E.T. groped for his nightlight and three paperback books on the floor by his bed. As the storm continued to rage outside, E.T.'s blanket, propped up by two round rumps at opposite sides of the bed, began to glow with a surreal, blue light.

It was 1:30 A.M. There were fires throughout the town. Most of Hogtown was without electric power. Governor Bellingham was notified, and the emergency at the college was officially downgraded from a cataclysm to a major disaster. One wing of Grimm Hall was damaged by an electrical fire, but the language laboratory and the rare collection of ancient Babylonian shards were spared. Only a few gators managed to survive the enigmatic Tower catastrophe -- mostly stragglers who reached the scene after the ground had already opened up. The smaller specimens were noosed and trucked back to the outlying swamps, but the larger animals, old enough to be held responsible for their actions, were executed on the spot.

All traces of the Tower were gone. The earth had swallowed the tallest edifice in the Magic Kingdom together with the huge pool of ooze that had formed around it. All that remained was an enormous pit about seventy yards across and of undetermined depth. Smoke and steam ascended from the dark depths of the pit until around 3:00 A.M. By dawn, the pit was dry enough to walk down its steep slope. Dante Tallahassee, our respected geologist from Tirol, arrived in his cleated boots and climbed down into the pit, examining it from every conceivable angle. He confessed to reporters that he had never seen anything like it, although he noted several points of similarity to the crater in Vesuvius.

I took my leave of Woland and Co. around midnight, shortly after the Tower had disappeared. I wanted to see the disaster area with my own disbelieving eyes. I parted with Woland reluctantly because Coldburn's castle had become a central arena in the disaster. Woland continued to operate his remote control as Azazello and Mr. Korovyev pommelled one horrified physiognomy after another, extracting their victims from the TV set with the aid of Korovyev's long, elastic arms.

When I reached the college, the whole area was already cordoned off. Volunteers from Pi Gamma Gamma donned yel-

low Mickey Mouse raincoats and assisted police in keeping students outside the forbidden zone. Everyone wanted to see the mysterious crater. The Tower architect arrived and swore vehemently to reporters that the foundation design was more than adequate to support the structure. College administrators were visibly embarrassed and reticent about the disappearance of their offices, the nerve center of the institution. Reporters began to ask nasty questions about the timing of the disaster precisely during the Annual Teaching Awards. Might the cause of the disaster have been dynamite planted deep underground by a disgruntled student or instructor? And what did Dostoevsky have to do with it? Wasn't he dead long ago? The arrest of Professor Poogh raised many questions. Following orders from the Provost, college administrators refused comment.

But on the streets and in the taverns there was much speculation. It mostly centered around Slick, the vagrant who had been spotted pouring some sort of liquid at the base of the Tower. Old Bull Hendrix, who can be found at Charlie's Tavern just about any night of the week, was the first to suggest that Slick was hired by an unhappy professor to trigger the bomb by lighting gasoline. The unhappy professor was probably Professor Poogh, runnerup in the telethon.

Old Bull's theory had many advocates, but it left a few questions unanswered. How was it that Professor Poogh knew in advance that he would lose the competition? And who might have planted the huge charge of dynamite so far underground? Some speculated that the telethon was rigged and that Professor Poogh had arranged the explosion after learning about the conspiracy. Others suggested that Lombardaki's absence at the time of the disaster seemed highly suspicious, but staunch football fans took offense and defended the honor of the College President with their fists. The brawl at Charlie's was broken up by 2:30 A.M. There were a few broken fingers and some black eyes, but everyone parted as friends.

Toward 3:00 A.M., after they closed the tavern, I hitched a ride out to E.T.'s house. The rain was still pouring steadily and the low-lying stretches of road were knee-deep in water. E.T.'s house had sustained some major damage. Several

windows were broken and a huge oak had toppled alongside one wall, cutting across the power lines and grazing part of the roof and wall. A limb from another large oak had crashed through the roof, causing the fireplace chimney to crumble. Dr. Sanderson's bike lay by the front porch. To my surprise, Hörnerträger's shiny Mercedes stood in the driveway. The rear end was badly smashed -- evidently by a falling tree limb, I speculated at the time. The front doorframe of E.T.'s house had been forced off center and the door was slightly ajar.

I squeezed through the door and entered the living room. The curtains billowed and fluttered from the draft caused by the broken windows and door. The plaster was cracking and water dripped from the ceiling down onto the Persian carpet. The water hissed beneath my feet as I crossed the carpet to the dining room. Nobody seemed to be home. I knocked softly on E.T.'s bedroom door. I thought I could hear a voice, but there was no reply. I opened the door slightly. The room was cold and dark, illuminated by periodic lightning in the distance. A large, pointed tree limb, stripped of its bark, protruded downward through the ceiling. Then I noticed that E.T.'s bed was slightly aglow -- a light blue dome reminiscent of a UFO. The voice grew silent when I entered. Then it resumed:

*The evening was humid and gloomy. By ten o'clock ominous stormclouds moved in from all sides. Thunder struck and the rain came gushing like a waterfall. The streaming water lashed the earth. Lightning flashed again and again, and one could count to five during each rippling flash.*

Another voice commenced reading:

*'Wait a minute!' my uncle called out. 'Please, just one more word, just one more word...'*

*Uncle retreated to the corner, where he sat down in an armchair and covered his eyes with his hands, as though deep in thought.*

*At this moment a horrendous blow of thunder struck right over the house. The whole building shuddered. The*

*general's widow cried out. So did Miss Perepelitsyna. All of the old ladies made the sign of the cross, dumb from fear. So did Mr. Bakhcheev.*

*'Elijah the Prophet!' five or six voices whispered all at once.*

There was a pause before the first voice resumed in gnome-like tones:

*At that moment it was as though thunder and lightning had been unloosed in the office. Shaken by the lack of respect shown him and trying to uphold his own dignity, the flaming captain let loose with all his thunderbolts against the lady in fancy clothes who had been gaping at him with the stupidest of smiles.*

*... 'Again that rumbling, that thunder and lightning, whirlwind and hurricane! You're boiling over once again, taking it to heart,' said Nikodim Fomich in a consoling voice to Ilya Petrovich.*

As I later learned, Hörnerträger had been forcibly taken from the hospital by an enormous black cat and a stocky thug with a walleye and one protruding fang. They escorted him to his familial hearth in the sidecar of a motorcycle of prewar German vintage. He still seemed somewhat delirious from the explosion and kept mumbling "Kugelblitz... Kugelblitz..." the whole way. Dripping wet and still wearing the horned Viking helmet from the motorcycle ride, he found his better half in the jacuzzi with Buckie Sly -- and he was enraged. He did a sharp about-face and marched out to the garage in search of a weapon, shouting as he went: "Schweine in meinem Jacuzzi! Diese Frau... sie ist mein Stalingrad!..."

Buckie Sly grabbed his clothes and ran from the deck, racing down the flooded street as fast as his bare feet could carry him. Helweena leaped from the jacuzzi, but slipped on the pool of body oil, fell and cut her right hand on the broken glass. Hörnerträger emerged from the garage with a pitchfork, but panicked when he saw the tiny trail of blood leading to his wife's bedroom. The door was locked. He assumed she had slashed her wrists. He paused a moment, deciding whether to let her bleed. After all, then his trystes with the young mädchen

from Stuttgart could proceed unhindered. But no, he decided. It wouldn't look good. There would be talk at the college (that is, if there still was a college!). He dialed 911 -- slowly and hesitantly -- but the phone was dead.

At this moment, Tphutti Nutti arrived in his Fiat, but the brakes mysteriously failed and he smashed into the rear of Hörnerträger's Mercedes. Now Hörnerträger had no choice. He and Tphutti Nutti pounded on Helweena's door, but she only sat sobbing theatrically by her vanity chest, studying her tragic face from various angles in the mirror and refusing to come out. Finally Hörnerträger fetched an axe and chopped a large hole near the doorknob. Tphutti Nutti reached in and opened the door.

A hysterical scene ensued with tears, accusations and righteous indignation. She had sullied the patriarchal hearth. She had bitten the hand that fed her. He had failed to understand her. He had ignored her, forcing her to live a separate life. The drama was mitigated somewhat by the presence of Professor Nutti. He bandaged Helweena's slashed palm after dousing it generously with alcohol, eliciting a stream of elegant Slavic cuss words from between her clenched teeth.

Soon Will Sully arrived on his bicycle, all muddy from head to toe and with a hole in his forehead. He was in a state of shock. A towering bandit had jerked him right out of bed and marched him out to the chicken coup for "questioning." The gangly thug held a mauser to his head and asked him to translate three everyday phrases into three foreign languages. Sully strained to remember his ever-reliable rule of thumb: *Avoid contact with native speakers*. But that rule was of no help now and he failed each test. Then the bandit pressed the mauser hard against Sully's head as he gave him one more final chance.

"Why is there no storm when Foma Fomich is thrown out of the house in Stepanchikovo?"

"Well," Sully guessed, "that's your atmospheric conditions for you. Maybe there really was no storm on that day in Stepanchikov?..."

Sully guessed wrong. The bandit pulled the trigger, the mauser thundered with deafening force and Sully tumbled against the chicken coup from the blow. It would be an exaggeration to say that his life passed before his eyes, but he did recall Marmeladov and his vote against Yuri Ilyich's tenure. The chickens squawked in outrage and fluttered before his eyes. He thought this would be his last vision and expected that all would now go black. But the feature show continued, so to speak. He could distinctly see the black and white chicken droppings that had besplattered the coup and he sensed the reflections of lightning that still frolicked in the environs of Hogtown. When he struggled to his feet, the skinny bandit was gone. He felt for his wallet. It was still in his pocket, but when he opened it he found it empty. "Neat trick," he thought, still assuming that he would soon lose consciousness. He touched the wound on his forehead, expecting to steep his hand in blood -- but there was no blood, only an oddly shaped hole! He ran inside and looked in the bathroom mirror. Sure enough, there was a hole in his head! It was horseshoe-shaped and through it he could see the candle that burned on the shelf behind him. He recalled Marmeladov. Then he recalled E.T.'s warning, which all had dismissed as nonsense. E.T. must know what was going on!

He ran to his bike and set out for E.T.'s, but when he reached the big bend in the road he decided to go to Hörnerträger instead. After all, this was departmental business, and Hörnerträger had categorically forbidden his troops to go around him. Ten Gallon dutifully turned left instead of right. As he pedalled faster and faster, the wind whistled through the hole in his forehead and mathematical formulas of aerodynamics which he had forgotten long ago in college now kept flashing vividly through his brain.

Frau Frau reached Hörnerträger's palatial home soon after Ten Gallon. She, too, sensed that what was happening must somehow be connected with Marmeladov, especially in light of the mysterious reference to Dostoevsky during the telethon. However, it was not the allusion to Dostoevsky which incited her to race to the chairman. Nor was it her flooding basement, the gaping hole in her ceiling or the shattered crystal

that was now strewn across her dining room tiles. It was her tongue. Around 2:00 A.M. she began to notice strange sensations. By 2:30 her tongue began to have spasms, shooting uncontrollably from her mouth as though it were trying to spear something. It seemed to be growing! She looked in the cracked dining room mirror and was aghast to see that the tip of her tongue had now divided in two! Her tongue was now forked, pink and narrow -- and it vibrated nervously as it shot with deadly speed a full six inches from her mouth. She was hysterical, as people usually are in such situations. She tried to call her gynecologist, but the phone was dead, so she dialled her cosmetologist and was surprised to find that phone just as dead as the gynecologist's. She lunged from mirror to mirror, hoping that it wasn't really as bad as the first, broken mirror suggested.

For a moment she listened to the voice of reason, which spoke in a nasal twang and seemed to proceed from the telephone receiver on the dining room wall: "Wait a minute. Calm down. Let's think things over soberly. Maybe it's not such a great loss after all? I mean, why do we always have to judge women by patriarchal stereotypes of feminine beauty? Why must all women have thin waists, soft skin, sensuous breasts -- and a short, blunt tongue that never protrudes far from its resting place?"

Frau Frau sobbed uncontrollably and struggled to cover her sleek, darting tongue with her hands. She grabbed the phone receiver and cursed like a stevedore as she angrily dashed it to the floor. The plastic cover on the mouthpiece broke off and spun across the floor, but the voice of reason continued:

"Now, now. Let's try to be objective. What seems like a loss is sometimes an enormous gain. Let's take that tongue of yours, for example. Imagine yourself in an Italian restaurant with a tall plate of sumptuous spaghetti. Just think of the advantages! Or think of your typing speed! Think of all those hard-to-reach places. Think of the erogenous zones!... But most important: think of all those viperous little verbal darts you had to constantly improvise and sharpen in the past. Now

there's no need to beat around the bush with all that verbiage. You can go straight for the jugular!..."

Frau Frau hoisted her large Chinese vase (the one with the pink dragon) from its pedestal by the doorway and dropped it onto the impudent receiver. She scored a direct hit. The voice of reason grew silent. She fetched a yellow scarf to conceal her tongue and drove straight to Hörnerträger's, hoping blindly that someone would help her.

When she arrived, Professor Nutti, Hörnerträger and Helweena and Sully examined her metamorphised tongue. Hörnerträger and Nutti showed sincere commiseration, but Helweena struggled to conceal giggles of glee at Frau Frau's ridiculous misfortune. As Frau Frau demonstrated the uncontrollable flicking of her forked tongue, Helweena even took the liberty of parodying her by quickly darting her tongue in reply to the movements of Frau Frau's "stinger." But Helweena's glee turned to horror when she felt herself losing control. Her own tongue began to flick more frequently and farther. It was growing! She ran to the bathroom and looked in the mirror. Sure enough! It had split near the end and was growing by the minute. She could do nothing to control its nervous flicking. Frau Frau now found a sister in misfortune. The two ladies sat on the bed and sobbed on each other's shoulder as their pink, forked tongues flicked spasmodically.

Meanwhile, Hörnerträger and Tphutti Nutti examined the hole in Ten Gallon's head. They determined that it was horse-shoe-shaped and that it formed a tunnel through the entire skull. Hörnerträger peered inside, but confessed that he saw nothing of note. Professor Nutti felt inside the openings with his finger, but reported only that it felt like mozzarella cheese. A mysterious tattoo had appeared on Ten Gallon's right thumb -- a whorl of tiny black letters had replaced Sully's thumbprint. They marvelled at the tiny filigree of spiralling script and finally managed to decipher the words with the aid of a magnifying glass: *Avoid contact with native speakers at all costs.*

When Canin, Stableboy and Ikota arrived, they all debated these extraordinary phenomena.

“There must be a scientific explanation for all of this,” Canin argued.

“Yes,” Stableboy concurred, “maybe some radioactivity has leaked in the area...”

“Or toxic wastes, maybe?” suggested Professor Nutti. “Hey, that might also explain the alligators!...”

“?”

“??”

“???”

“You’re talking about genetic mutations,” Canin objected. “That takes time. This has happened all of a sudden.”

Finally they decided to drive to E.T.’s and try to get to the bottom of everything. Somehow they all crammed into Hörnerträger’s Mercedes and set out for E.T.’s. On the way, the car kept mysteriously dying and lightning pursued them with a vengeance the whole way, striking alongside the car several times and causing the lights and heater to short out. By the time they reached E.T.’s house, the right hands of Ikota, Stableboy, Nutti and Canin had all turned into hideous scorpions’ claws, much to everyone’s horror. Most frightening of all, however, was the rhinoceros horn that had sprouted between Hörnerträger’s eyes and was now growing with alarming speed. It curiously complemented the horns on the Viking helmet which he had not removed since his hair-raising motorcycle ride from the hospital.

When I arrived around 3:00 A.M. and opened the door to E.T.’s bedroom, all nine colleagues were nestled beneath the glowing blue blanket on E.T.’s king-sized waterbed, crouching on their knees and elbows. They huddled in a circle with their heads together in the center of the bed, where the blue glow was brightest. The gnomish voice droned on:

*...Foma had barely uttered his last word when Uncle grabbed him by the shoulders, turned him around like a straw and flung him at the glass door that leads out into the yard. The blow was so strong that the doors flew wide open and Foma tumbled head over heels down the seven stone steps into the yard. The shattered glass flew in all directions, ringing as it struck the steps of the porch.*

*'Gavrila! Help him up!' Uncle exclaimed, pale as a corpse. 'Put him on the wagon. You've got two minutes to get him out of Stepanchikovo!'*

*...I should add that at this moment a heavy thunderstorm set in. The blows of thunder came more and more often. Heavy drops of rain began pounding at the windows.*

*'There's your holiday for you!' mumbled Mr. Bakhcheev, lowering his head and spreading his fingers.*

The lightning continued to pommel the trees outside E.T.'s house. The thunder was reminiscent of the bombing of Dresden. It dawned on me that this was probably the first time these people had really put their heads together in the cause of... well, God only knows...

In hindsight I have often tried to imagine what it must have been like for these nine men and women of science as they huddled beneath E.T.'s blanket. There were the darting tongues, the scorpion claws, the big horn over Hörnerträger's nose, the enigmatic hole in Sully's head, the quiet, gnomish voice like that of a shaman... Add to this the imminent danger of being incinerated by lightning... It must have been eerie beneath that blanket. But at the time, I knew nothing of the mysterious metamorphoses or of the hole in Sully's head. I felt that I was trespassing -- as though I had intruded upon a confessional... or a wake. I decided to find Marmeladov and left them there beneath that glowing dome, nine raised rumps marking the spot where nine doctors of philosophy were hunkered down beneath the million-volt sword of a Truth that would outlive them all.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN: BURNING QUESTIONS

I hitched a ride, hoping to find Marmeladov and tell him all that had happened on that eventful night. Unfortunately, the road was washed out at this end of the North Marsh, and I had to wade through the waist-deep water and go the last three miles on foot. It was about 4:30 A.M. when I reached the Marmeladovs' place. During the storm, the swamp had risen and closed in around the dilapidated old frame house which they were renting. The house had no foundation and rested on bricks and two-by-fours. It seemed to rise above the floodwaters like a hut on stilts in the Amazon rainforest. The rusty old Mercury was parked on higher ground beside the highway and looked shinier than usual beneath the rain and lightning. I expected that Marmeladovs would be asleep, but I had to see him. There were too many burning questions that demanded answers. Besides, Hogtown was enduring an unprecedented cataclysm. Who wouldn't want to know?... An oil lamp gave off a yellow glow in the sunporch as I descended from the highway into the trees and waded toward the house. Through the screen door I could see Marmeladov asleep on the old couch in the sunporch. He only stirred and mumbled when I knocked. When I entered the house, swamp water squirted from my sneakers and streamed from my jeans onto the old wood floor.

I tried to wake Marmeladov, but he had been drinking and fought off my efforts to tell him the urgent news. I grabbed him by the shirt collar and shook him until his eyes opened halfway.

"Yuri Ilyich, have you heard? Yuri Ilyich!"

He opened his mouth, but no words were forthcoming.

"Have you heard about the Tower? It caught fire and sank!"

"She sank?" Yuri Ilyich mumbled incoherently.

"That's right. It just sank into the ground and disappeared. It's gone!"

"Gone?"

“Yep. Gone. You could see the whole thing on TV. If you had any power, that is. Half the town is without power. And there’s fires all over the place. It happened during the telethon.”

“??”

“The teaching awards.”

“Gone...”

“Yep. The whole damned Tower -- just sucked into the bowels of the earth.”

“Vowels?”

“Bowels,” I repeated, pointing to my lower abdomen.

“There were... wictims?” he asked.

“Well, I don’t know exactly... I mean, there were definitely victims, but... well, now they’ve got the whole area cordoned off. I was with Woland and Mr. Korovyev. They made it sink with their remote control. I’m convinced of that. I saw it happen. I was with them in Coldburn’s castle. They put Hörnerträger on the cutting edge and drew a lot of blood.” I rose from my chair and poured myself a glass of gin. My head was spinning and I felt the onset of a fever. I diluted my gin with some Sprite and tried to remember the burning questions that I had wanted to ask Marmeladov.

“Yuri Ilyich!... Yuri Ilyich...” I tugged at the old fellow’s sleeve. “Yuri Ilyich, is it true...” I shook him by the shoulders. He opened his eyes a crack as sheet lightning rippled its way across the dark and distant sky. “Yuri Ilyich, do you really consider your discovery to be the biggest find ever in the study of Dostoevsky?”

He tried to raise his hand to point at my chest. But only a few slurred Russian words rolled from his thick and errant tongue: “*Ty menya.... uvazha....*” Then he sank back down onto the couch. He reeked of alcohol, tobacco and garlic.

I tried to taunt him into replying: “Yuri Ilyich, do you think you’re number one?... Huh?... Are you number one? Are you the ace of spades?... Think you’ve discovered America, huh? Think you’ve discovered America?...”

It was hopeless. Yuri Ilyich was soused. I decided to wait until morning to extract the answers I wanted. My head was

swimming from the whirlwind of fantastic events, but at least the gin seemed to assuage the fever. I peeled off my wet clothes and plopped down on the living room couch. As I drifted off to sleep, I could hear Marmeladov's snoring and the growl of thunder somewhere far away outside.

Later -- it must have been just before dawn because the sky had lightened to a pastel gray -- I woke up to the sound of voices. All I saw and heard was perceived through the warped prism of my fever, and I assumed it was all only a dream. Korovyev's jeering face appeared before my eyes. He winked clownishly and commented: "I hope this won't shake your belief in free will, Gabe. This sort of direct intervention doesn't happen every day, you know... It's like the weather -- here today, gone tomorrow. And we always try to give 'em a choice: bread or freedom. Bread has always been the hands-down favorite."

"Keep an eye on things," Korovyev continued, "for a while anyway. An observant chronicler might help the citizens of Hogtown sort out the pieces..."

Korovyev winked and disappeared. I heard the squeaky screen door slam shut as I closed my eyes. I assumed this had all been a delirious dream. But then I heard car engines starting and I leaped from the couch to test my senses. Up on the highway, four cars set out down the road: two Ford Mustangs, a Jeep Bronco and Marmeladov's rusty old Mercury. In the morning twilight I could make out no details except a large black tomcat sitting at the wheel of the Bronco, the tip of his tail protruding from the window as the cars drove away. He placed his paw to his mouth and whistled in such a supernatural, deafening tone that the window pane cracked right before my nose and a large oak branch snapped and sagged to the road just as the four cars passed and headed off into the distance.

I checked the sunporch and the bedroom -- Marmeladov was gone. On the table by the oil lamp lay his papers. It was a messy pile. Some of the papers evidently belonged to *Dostoevsky's Secret Code*, with other sundry manuscripts mixed in. Wine, tobacco and pancake grease were the cement that held this edifice together. I sifted through the

archaeological layers and found the poem that had recently appeared in the Favorite Recipes column of the *Hogtown Daily Gazette*, where it was squeezed into prose by the editor in order to save space. (The *Gazette* has no poetry column, but the editor is always eager to accept local contributions, which occur infrequently.) As it was published in the *Gazette*, the poem reads as follows:

*[Translation From Lev Gumilev:]*

*Half the moon's unfathomed secrets glowed on her brow then, it seemed, as it nodded earthward between starry ringlets of Spanish moss and forgotten dreams. Inquisitive spirits hovered above the singing hacienda and winged their way through the window, incognito, under cover, (pious crickets, praying manti, ladybugs and cicadas) to wonder how eyes so dark caress the heart with light all-seeing, warm and everlasting. Stopping time temporarily, she lengthened the night by one small eternity and poured out for me a momentary salvation, a bittersweet communion, sensuous and neverlasting. The warm earth sang and stars swarmed overhead, and round and round night's beehive spun -- womb of sweeter, warmer days to come. I marvelled at the curve and firmness of lips which brought the Conquistadors to their knees.*

*Nothing said of that inner sanctum where Madonnas with child peer chastely from walls of mother-of-pearl. I hurried home to peruse *The Conquest of Mexico* and *The Conquest of Peru*, and vowed to pray on Resurrection Day -- to light three small candles at the chapel and whisper sweet hosannas to each slope and twist and turn of the Sierra Madre. I'll weave these songs into my humble psalter, but, God, I long to touch the little altar, to forget all sin and shame and burn in tortuous tongues of flame.*

There it was, the “erotic” poem that Helweena had so indignantly denounced. I looked for the hidden, indecent message which the chairman’s better half had unmasked, but the task proved to be too demanding for my limited powers of interpretation. But, then, I am not a literary critic.

I continued to sift through Yuri Ilyich's papers, both on the table and in three boxes under the table. But it was in complete disarray. The papers had been shuffled and reshuffled as Yuri Ilyich jumped from one work to the other. Prose ended in poetry and poetry flowed into prose. True, Yuri Ilyich had divided the manuscripts into sections, using mostly cards that were rejection notices from about twenty different publishing houses: Cornell University Press, Indiana University Press, Penguin Classics etc. Each card contained a brief paragraph, usually including the all-purpose formula: "Your proposal does not fit in with our current publication plans." It would take weeks to bring the papers into order. What struck me most was that Marmeladov wrote without an audience -- with the single exception of his foray into English in his poem for the *Hogtown Gazette*. Later, I took all the papers to E.T., who leafed through them and explained that much of Marmeladov's work was fiction: novels, poetry, plays... E.T. still has the papers in his garage.

Outside, the sky was cloudy but oddly peaceful after the unprecedented storm of the previous night. The level of the flooding swamp had subsided, but a bull gator lay motionless in the mud behind the house. A whippoorwill sang occasionally in the trees. A helicopter cut across the horizon in the direction of Hogtown, where the cleanup must have been getting underway. I thought of returning to town in order to view the devastation by daylight, but returned to my bed, realizing I didn't have the strength.

That whole day and the next night I lay in a fever, sinking into an absurd delirium where deans, department chairmen and other bureaucrats foraged the bottom of a dark swamp alongside eels, tortoises and undulating serpents of the marsh. And there were Sully, Tphutti Nutti, Stableboy, Helweena -- our gang -- each in cap and gown and holding office hours among the reeds. They were truer than life, each clinging to the swamp bottom with webbed hands and feet.

In moments of relative clarity, I recalled my school days -- the classics we read then and the qualities that made them classics, all those highminded discussions about the virtues of honesty, charity, courage, perseverance, respect for originality, the basic freedoms, the dignity of man -- and I kept running headlong up against the numbing realization that these mentors of America's youth, these very same colleagues of Yuri Ilyich... they, too, must have esconced these ideals in their classes as well. And surely they still do... But then, before these cloudy thoughts could crystallize into a cogent line of reasoning, a curious realization suddenly zigzagged across my mind's horizon. It was this: that, even if Marmeladov were the only person in the world who believed that his discovery was the biggest find in Dostoevsky scholarship, then at least there was one person in the world who held to this belief. One is more than none. Sometimes, I realized, it is infinitely more. It was one of those absurd thoughts that are so typical of delirium. I drifted off into sleep, and in my dreams I saw a conquistador.

## EPILOGUE

Several years have passed since the sinking of the Tower. College officials were visibly embarrassed by the unexpected turn of events. The telethon which had been carefully designed to portray the institution in its best light had hardly accomplished its purpose. Classes were suspended for a week so that Red Cross tents could be erected and outfitted as temporary lecture halls. It was decided to move the lectures of E.T. Poogh and Godfry Root to the football stadium.

Meanwhile, college administrators wracked their brains over the future of the Magic Kingdom. The big question was what to do with the huge, gaping hole that had replaced the Tower. The official version continued to be that it was simply an unusually large sinkhole. However, this sinkhole behaved most peculiarly. Students reported that horrendous cries and groans could be heard from the bottom of the pit on moonless nights just after midnight. Not long after the disaster, they claimed to have seen an enormous, bloodshot eyeball rising and hovering over the pit, blinking and glowing eerily before descending back into the depths of the canyon.

Nobody really believed these ghoulish tales, but the college nonetheless decided that the safest thing to do, politically speaking, was to cover the whole thing up (the pit, that is). The dumptrucks and bulldozers came each night and the area was cordoned off. Each night, the dumptrucks would bring load after load to the edge of the pit and the bulldozers would shove the dirt and rocks over the edge. Each morning, the trucks and bulldozers would leave just before sunrise, and college officials would don hardhats and walk out to the pit with construction company representatives. There, they would peer over the edge of the pit and exchange skeptical glances. Then they would shrug their shoulders and go back to the office to phone the next in command.

Finally, word reached President Lombardaki that the efforts to cover the pit were only making it deeper. Alternative suggestions were then considered: to carve benches in the sides

of the pit and create an amphitheatre; to fill the pit with water and call it a duck pond; to use the pit for sewage disposal and call it a duck pond; to simply leave it as it stood and call it a duck pond. But in the end, college officials decided to quietly dissociate the institution from the cavernous pit and all the unpleasant legends surrounding it by casually shifting the central campus to another location.

Thus began a new chapter in the history of the Magic Kingdom -- the construction of the new tower and the moving of Grimm Hall and Kant Hall to their new locations. The new tower is not nearly so grandiose as its predecessor, reaching barely half as high and clinging to the earth with a reinforced foundation that covers twice the area of its first floor. As college architects argued: mathematics is mathematics, but why take chances unnecessarily?

The colossal pit in Hogtown came to be known superstitiously as the Devil's Churn. As part of the coverup, the trustees of the college pulled strings in the capital so that the hole was declared a natural wonder. Funds were quickly allocated for a state park and college geologists secretly concocted a history of the "natural wonder" extending back millions of years. A walkway now leads down into the depths of the pit and daily excursions are said to be both instructive and profitable. The park closes at twilight and, as far as I know, all who have taken the tour have returned safely to the surface.

President Lombardaki returned from South Africa the morning after the disaster. When he slid down the escape slide to exit his airplane (there is no ladder tall enough for his plane at our airstrip) observers were shocked to see that his head was covered by a white hood with two holes for his eyes, and he was immediately rushed to Hogtown Memorial Hospital. Despite the power outages and impassable roads, word soon got around town that Lombardaki had gone looney in South Africa and had returned as an ardent Ku Klux Klansman.

However, this rumor was pure fantasy. In reality, the situation was as follows. As Dr. Lombardaki listened to the audio portion of the telethon during his return flight to Hogtown, he repeatedly blushed from embarrassment and grimaced from outrage. Soon thereafter, the ladies in the seats beside him

began to scream in horror. Stewardesses managed to drag him to the rear of the plane and slip a pillow case over his head, which had turned into the head of a huge cockroach. They managed to hold him there while the pilot calmed down the other passengers by announcing that the mask was “only a gag.”

Lombardaki was kept under close observation at the hospital. By around 11:00 P.M. the huge prune-like eyes had shrunk to their normal size, while the cheek plates and antennae had almost disappeared. He was moved from Intensive Care to room 137, just down the hall from the ward where Ten Gallon, Helweena, Frau Frau, Stableboy and the others were recuperating.

Time is the greatest healer, and by late the next afternoon all had recovered enough to return home. Hörnerträger wore a thick cast over his nose to disguise the shrinking rhino horn that still protruded between his brows. The hole in Ten Gallon’s head gradually healed at each end of the tunnel, leaving a scar in the shape of an inverted horseshoe with the English letter “u” inside it. Doctors were in total agreement that his intellectual faculties were unimpaired. Frau Frau’s tongue returned to its former size and style, but Helweena’s never quite regained its former shape and coordination. The observant eye can see that it is still forked ever so slightly, and often during her lectures it strains to dart a good distance from her mouth, an urge which she deftly disguises by quickly licking her lips or by bracing her tongue against her teeth or upper lip as though pondering a crossword puzzle or practicing to be a hooker outside the Hogtown by Lamplight laundromat. She now undergoes regular therapy for the nightmares that pursue and torment her. She dreams of Buckie Sly and their first tryste in that cozy little hotel room not far from the Polish-German border. But then her dream turns to the Hogtown Leaping Frog Contest in which Buckie’s invincible Fro-Fro is suddenly thrown into convulsions after leading the pack almost to the finish line. It is a horrible sight! The purebred leaper flops onto his back, kicking convulsively and foaming

profusely at the mouth, belly-up beneath the hot southern sun. Then the nightmare invariably shifts back to the plains of Eastern Europe, where -- horror of horrors! -- her telegram to Buckie ending in the words "DONT TELL STOP" falls into enemy hands. Oh, God! What if Helmut learns of this?! Then she races on the train to the mountain resort where the trusting husband sits beneath the moose antlers in the hotel lobby reading a leatherbound edition of *Zauberberg* as he patiently awaits his trusting wife's arrival. The memory of his equine face haunts her and it seems to her that his ears grow big and green as the train draws near the mountains. At a station stop at the foot of the mountains, she can endure the torture no longer and flings herself beneath the wheels of the straining locomotive. Then she wakes up, unscathed but shaken.

After spending a night in the morgue, Wilbur Coldburn was rushed to the hospital when doctors preparing to perform an autopsy noticed that the dean was still breathing ever so slowly. He soon returned to his post and now wears high, starched collars to conceal the rubber stoppers that still protrude slightly from the sides of his neck. His closest colleagues in the college administration say he is "the coolest head on the force" and predict that he will rise to the highest posts.

Marmeladov has not been seen or heard of in Hogtown since his mysterious disappearance. There was a rumor that Yuri Ilyich died beneath the wheels of a furniture truck on or near New York's Brooklyn Bridge, but I found nothing to confirm this in the newspapers of New York City.

Gogo Puzaty returned from Moscow with a set of bridges that are the pride of the Soviet arms industry. However, he did not receive the promotion for which he had yearned due to the college's new commitment to gender quotas which precluded the hiring of a male to replace Marmeladov. His financial position has improved, and he no longer is forced to moonlight at Lake Apopka. In addition to his job as Russian instructor, he works as a houseboy in the home of the

Hörnerträgers, where he lives comfortably in a spacious walk-in closet.

Buckie Sly is now completing a higher degree at Cornell, the *alma mater* of Helweena Hörnerträger. We were all very surprised and happy for Buckie when he first received the acceptance letter. Nobody expected that Buckie would rise so high with only a 3.069 grade point average, but the people at Cornell must have found potential promise in Buckie that many of us had overlooked. Buckie visits Hogtown occasionally, and the old wound that rankled between Buckie and Helmut now seems to have brought them closer together.

The morning after the catastrophe, Dr. Sanderson set out for Hogtown City Hall in order to surrender to the police, strange as this may seem. But as he climbed the steep wooden steps leading to police headquarters, he fainted -- evidently from exhaustion after the traumatic experience of the storm. When he regained consciousness, he found himself in an arm-chair in Chief Peterson's office. An officer in dark sunglasses offered him a glass of murky water, while two clerks fanned him with towels. Dr. Sanderson stated that he wanted to report a crime -- a man was axed at a secret meeting -- and that he wished to make a full confession as an accomplice. He added that he expected no mercy and was determined to serve out his whole sentence with courage and dignity. But when Chief Peterson finally sorted out the story and realized that there was no body, no murder weapon, no rational motive for murder -- and, in fact, there appeared to be no evidence of any crime whatsoever -- he suggested that Dr. Sanderson get some rest in the watchful care of psychiatrist Brad Brady at Hogtown Memorial Hospital. As the officer in sunglasses escorted the distraught professor to the door, Dr. Sanderson began to rant and rave about the basic rights of man, about the U.S. Constitution and the laws of the state. Chief Peterson only smiled sagely as he opened a fresh can of snuff and replied:

"Dr. Sanderson, my job is to maintain law and order. I do the best job I can. When you fellows huddle together in a

secret meeting behind closed doors to decide a man's fate, who is there to look after that man's rights? Who even knows his rights? Does he really have any rights?" He snapped his snuff can shut and thumped it loudly with the blackened nail of his thick middle finger.

Hans Sanderson only foamed and gnashed his teeth in reply to Chief Peterson's rhetorical questions, but later he fully recuperated from his psychic trauma and is now completing his third book. (As the reader already knows, the first two were never completed.) This one is entitled *Extrasensory Methods of Literary Criticism*.

Hans and E.T. occasionally meet in E.T.'s office. They speak in whispers and place the telephone in a desk drawer, debating whether to take action. Sometimes it is Dr. Sanderson who proposes that they make a motion at the next department meeting: that anonymous phone calls and secret oral testimonials by students be eliminated from teacher evaluations. Sometimes it is Dr. Poogh's idea. It is a good idea, they both agree. But as they debate a plan of action, they always come up against the same inevitable conclusion: it will offend the colleagues. It will create a hostile work environment. Therefore, it is an unworkable idea. But they discuss it at great length anyway, as though for the first time. Finally they leave, shaking their heads at the tragic insurmountability of the obstacles. But the meetings bring them a certain sense of satisfaction nevertheless. After all, they have met and whispered conspiratorily. They have envisioned in their mind's eye dissent and reform -- and isn't this also a form of action?

E.T. is often haunted in his sleep by a recurring dream. He dreams that he has finally decided to lodge a complaint about the treatment of Marmeladov. He inserts a blank sheet of paper into an envelope and seals the envelope with firm resolve. He examines the envelope once again to be sure there is no return address or other identifying marks. But then, as he drops the letter into the mail slot at the post office, he is seized

by terror and wakes up, breathless and streaming in a cold sweat.

In court, E.T. was acquitted of voyeurism and stalking. However, he received a formal reprimand from President Lombardaki, which he accepted meekly and with bowed head. He is now writing a book about superconductivity and Russian writers of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Each year at the annual college picnic, the Modern Language faculty nibble on the hot boiled peanuts as they mix democratically with students and common folk as well as with elite members of the college management. In keeping with the festival's historic theme, Herr Hörnerträger urges the colleagues to appear in the attire of pioneer days. Each year it warms the heart to watch when Hörnerträger treats his entire entourage to a free ride on the carousel as the evening draws to a close. Dressed in the fetching deerskin miniskirt and feather of a mythical Indian maiden, Helweena mounts a fiery red steed and rides sidesaddle, as though to enhance the enigma of her sex. Dr. Sully clambers onto the big chestnut behind her. Not to be outdone by any of the boys, Frau Frau straddles her burgundy mare and enjoys the tightness of her Rough Rider jeans. Herr Hörnerträger adjusts the brim of his sheriff's hat and mounts the tall black stallion that leads the cavalcade. Behind him, Dr. Stableboy sits astride a piebald gray who chomps at the bit and curls his flying hooves beneath him. Frau Frau, Helweena and Sully are followed by Dr. Ikota, Dr. Nutti and Professor Canin, all mounted on obedient, particolored horsies. E.T. and Dr. Sanderson bring up the rear, preferring to sit safely in the wooden seat that is there for infants and the fainthearted, with elves and fairies flitting across its high wooden back. They hold tight to the armrests as the music starts and the carousel begins to turn. Then it is a joy to behold as the carousel spins and the pipe organ pumps out "It's a Small World" and old favorites by Stephen Foster. Helmut rides proudly in his black attire. The silver spangles on his hatband flash and the star of justice gleams on his sunken chest as his mighty steed flies through the night like Destiny itself. But Stableboy is close behind and it seems that at any moment he will overtake the jet-black stallion -- and then surely all hell

will be let loose. But for now all is held in unison by the spinning spokes and the organ's dizzy harmony. Frau Frau is exhilarated as she bears down on her frenzied mount, while Helweena waves and throws little Indian-maiden kisses to friends in the crowd. Professor Sully sits resolute, but his eyes keep sliding upward from the tiny beads on her mocassins to the Indian maiden's palefaced thighs. Like a man with a high mission, Professor Sully bides his time. Then come Professor Ikota, Professor Nutti and Professor Canin, each sitting awkwardly in the saddle and holding tight to the ears or mane as he dutifully performs the role that fate has dealt him. Dr. Sanderson sits passively, while E.T. seems a bit nauseated by the carousel's accelerating spin. On and on they ride, ten doctors of philosophy. Where are they flying to, I wonder. Where will their steeds' hooves touch down?...

—

There are legends about painters who lived centuries ago and brought joy and color to the world as they painted holy scenes from the Bible, styling saints and sacred figures after the common folk who lived around them. It was pleasing to find your own spitting image in the face of St. Francis, St. Paul or the Virgin Mary or to see your own pet Saint Bernard keeping watch in the manger beside the Christ Child. Just as these ancient god-daubers brought joy and mirth to lowly mortals, I hope that my humble brush, too, will bring joy to those who find their own familiar traits in the simple and unembellished portrait which I have painted.



